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N O E L ;

OR,

IT WAS TO BE.

BY

ROBERT BAKER AND SKELTON YORKE.

'Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud,
'Tis virtue that doth make them most admired,
'Tis government that makes them seem divine.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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NOEL; OR, IT WAS TO BE.

CHAPTER I.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

Celia.—Bon jour, M. le Beau, what's the news?

Le Beau.—I will tell you the beginning, and, if it please your ladyships, you may see the end; for the best is yet to do; and here, where you are, they are coming to perform it.

As You Like It.

THE Manor House at Overstone was an antiquated-looking building, especially on the north side. Shaded on the west by a grove of firs, among which the rooks kept up a continual cawing, and on the right by well-grown evergreens, and fine old beeches, the quaint gable over the principal entrance wore an air of calm superiority, as if the

slated roofs peeping up here and there among the distant trees were *parvenus* too insignificant to engage its attention. The pointed windows lighting the large entrance-hall, which was open to the roof, were filled with coloured glass, containing the arms and quarterings of many generations of the Squires of Overstone; but these were not at present held in value, for the owner of the property was an absentee, and the house and grounds had recently been let to a widow lady, who, with her four daughters, had just come into residence.

It is a bright morning in the early summer, and a single gentleman past the prime of life stands at the hall door, and by an authoritative pull sets the bell in motion, its silvery sounds awakening all the echoes of the old house. The visitor glances up and down eagerly; the approach, the trees, the busy rooks, the aspect of the house, are all noted. His dress bespeaks him a clergyman, but his rotund person, high colour, and eager curious air, do not attract our sympathy. On entering the house, the same searching look is

cast at everything, the oak chairs in the hall, the handsome Turkey carpet which partially covers its old oak floor, the case of croquet lying in a corner, the aquarium in the one window, and the Wardian case in the other, are all entered in his inventory; and as he is ushered into the drawing-room, he is fully as much interested in the articles of *vertu*, the easel, and harp, and books lying on the table, as in the two handsome women who receive him as their guest.

"It is kind of you to call so early," Mrs. Hammerlye remarked; "we are entire strangers, and do not even know whether we belong to the parish of Overstone or to that of Irskill."

"I am sorry to tell you, madam, that the Manor House is undoubtedly in the Overstone parish. I am rector of Irskill, and would fain have reckoned you among my parishioners. But facts are stubborn things."

"Of course, Dr. Vansettle, you know this neighbourhood well?"

"I ought to do so; I have been here for twenty years. It is a good neighbourhood, but

not so good as it was, scarcely so hospitable as of yore, and spoiled by new-fangled notions."

"You surprise me. We were assured that the hospitality of the people here was unprecedented. The sociability of the neighbourhood was our chief inducement to settle here."

"Ah, you will not be disappointed. The fair and young and beautiful will be sought on every side. It is those who begin to seem a little passé who miss old companions and old customs."

The old rector smiled bewitchingly as he uttered this sentence, bowing towards the comely widow at the first compliment, and towards her daughter at the other two. Mrs. Hammerlye looked deprecatingly, and Miss Hammerlye had to feign a troublesome cough to hide her amusement.

"Do tell us who inhabit the houses we see in the distance. From the upper rooms we catch a glimpse of a red gable, among some splendid oak timber."

"That is Elliott's Cray, madam. It is a fine old manorial residence, and stands in a noble park. The oaks are the finest in the county, and the

estate includes nearly all the parish of Irskill. Mr. Elliott is the most important landowner in the neighbourhood."

"Indeed," replied Mrs. Hammerlye, with assumed indifference. The report she had received of the master of Elliott's Cray had had far more to do with her renting the Manor House at Overstone than the general sociability of the neighbourhood; but that was not a move to be shown to Dr. Vansettle. So she looked absently at the view, and then added, "Is Mr. Elliott a very old man?"

The rector could not suppress his merriment, which was the more overpowering, because, with the cunning of a practised old fox, he suspected the widow's game. His voice was rough and wheezy, and, therefore, unattractive, but his boisterous laugh was disagreeable in the extreme. The mother concealed her annoyance, but an impatient toss of the head revealed the daughter's vexation, and the doctor entered in his mental note-book, "Miss Hammerlye showy, wide-awake, and with a temper."

“Haw, haw!” he continued, with unabated vigour. “Excuse me, ladies, I fear I seem rude! But the idea of Noel Elliott being a very old man is too, too rich! Haw, haw! Why, madam, he is the beau of our circle; all the ladies are setting their caps at him.”

Miss Hammerlye walked to the window, and, taking up a book, conveyed a broad hint to the visitor that he was at liberty to take his departure, but he had no intention of doing so yet. He wished to find out more concerning the new comers, and Mrs. Hammerlye wished for more information from him; so she drew her chair a little nearer, and a hand-to-hand fencing match commenced between well-trained combatants, in which the victory was likely to remain long undecided.

“Tell me of the other neighbours, Dr. Vansettle. I do not care to hear more of Mr. Elliott, as you say he is a ladies’ man, and so spoiled.”

“Your pardon, madam, I did not say that he is a ladies’ man; but that each of the fair creatures would fain make him her man. If Elliott is spoiled at all, it is in his temper, and that is owing to a


sour-natured philosopher who sticks to him like a leech."

"Dear me, how painful!" ejaculated Mrs. Hammerlye. "Can he not rid himself of such a torment? I suppose the person is poor, and works on Mr. Elliott's compassion?"

"Haw, haw! no; not exactly, madam. Mr. Jans is not poor, nor pitiable. He is ten years older than Elliott, at the very least; but, by some accident, he went very late to college, so he and Noel were at the University together. There they formed a romantic friendship, by right of which Mr. Jans acts as a kind of tutor at Elliott's Cray."

"But I understand Mr. Elliott has aunts living with him—how do they bear this interference?"

The parson's eyes sparkled: he had gained an advantage; for Mrs. Hammerlye had professed to believe Elliott an aged man, yet she evidently knew of his aunts. But he suppressed his wish to laugh out, and answered cautiously, "He has aunts, but they don't live with him. There is a pretty house about a mile south of the Cray, behind those woods, overlooking the beautiful



valley of the Meander: the Misses Elliott live there."

"Oh, indeed! They, at any rate, are far advanced in years, I presume?"

"No, madam. Miss Elliott is about five-and-forty, but Miss Margaret is a dozen years her junior. The last Mr. Elliott but one had a large family, and the eldest son married while his youngest sister was a baby in arms. A comparatively small number lived to maturity, and of the two now remaining the elder has very frail health. From my own poor observations, I should say that Miss Margaret does anything but object to Mr. Jans' tutorship of her nephew."

"Intolerable interference both in the one and the other," exclaimed Sophy Hammerlye, without looking up from her book, and Dr. Vansettle chuckled, for he had already noted that she had not turned a page, so he knew that her abstraction had been feigned.

Her two sisters, entering at this moment, created a diversion, but the widow presently turned the conversation back into its old channel, asking,—

“Who occupies the pretty modern house which we passed as we came here? It is within a mile of the village of Irskill.”

“That is the residence of Lady Mary Morton.”

“Dear! a titled person. Pray, who is she?”

The rector made round eyes, and pursed up his mouth, attempting no answer for several seconds, then he said, slowly,—

“She is Lady Mary Morton.”

“Exactly; but who was her father? Is she married or unmarried? Is she friendly or proud? What age is she?”

Again the strange expression on the rector’s face.

“She is a nervous lady,” he said; “delicate and fretful. She lives with a companion, and she is a mystery.” His eyes said plainly, “I could explain all, but I don’t choose,” and the curiosity of the family was piqued, but they did not venture to question further.

“Are you fond of music, doctor?” asked Mrs. Hammerlye.

“Very, madam; and still more devoted to pictures.”

Mrs. Hammerlye smiled — “Julia, my dear, come and let Dr. Vansettle hear your last song, with the harp accompaniment; and, Emma, bring round your portfolio, and show your sketches.”

Julia took her place obediently, she had a more pliable expression than either of her sisters; but Emma looked worried, as she laid aside a board she had been drawing upon, and the rector saw she considered him a bore. But the drawings were good, and he enjoyed turning them over, until he came to a grotesque figure, and asked its history.

Mrs. Hammerlye looked displeased. “It is a foolish drawing that Emma made of her writing-master at school. I have twice expressed a wish that it should be destroyed. Don’t let me see it again, Emma.”

The girl laid the caricature aside; but, from her defiant air, she evidently did not mean to destroy it. Julia’s voice was sweet; and when her song was finished, the mother bade Sophy accompany her on the piano. Dr. Vansettle was well amused, and was surprised, when a servant brought in wine and biscuits, to find he had

been in the house two hours, and this his first visit! Mrs. Hammerlye made him take a second glass, and then he bade them farewell, and hastened away.

“Mamma!” exclaimed Sophy, as his footsteps died away along the corridor, “how could you let that odious man bore us to such an extent. It is an abominable shame, for I know you can get rid of troublesome visitors when you choose!”

“How short-sighted you are, Sophy; it is well for you that you have me to manage for you. Don’t you see that that man, truly odious though he be, is the newsmonger of the neighbourhood. He knows everything about everybody; and in first coming to the place it is worth a great deal to stand well with him. He will blaze forth your accomplishments and my hospitality far and wide. I only fear that he may also mention Sophy’s impatience and Emma’s caricature. Where is Charlotte?”

“Playing croquet alone in the garden. We are going, too. Come out, mamma; we will all

wear our new hats, and then, if visitors come, we can ask them out."

"Do so, my dears. Dress yourselves very becomingly, for who can tell whether or no Mr. Elliott may call, or perhaps some of the officers from Overstone."

"How I wish it was leap-year, or that the privileges of leap-year could be extended to other years!" exclaimed Emma, as she and Sophy arrayed themselves in their newest costume. "I get so weary of these covert attempts to get a husband. I would rather put a pistol to a man's head, and say, 'Marry me or die,' than spend my life in touting."

"You are a fool, Emma. You can't throw out a distinct line for yourself; you can only imitate my tactics, and so, of course, your plans being second-hand, fail."

"It is not my fault that I am like you in character. I would be different if I could. I am sure I don't admire you, Sophy."

"Thanks, many, for the compliment. You are unlike me in two things: you have a much worse

temper and no invention. Mine is a marked character, yours is not. Try on some new pattern."

"Then I'll read spirit-books, and be sentimental."

"Bravo! Then you'll create a diversion, and come to profit. Julia and I talk plain. You had better set up a lisp."

"Come, then, and I'll practith. Will you have the kindneth to begin the game."

Sophy cheered her, and Emma soon became familiar with her new form of speech.

CHAPTER II.

A CLOUDED LIFE.

Heaven is rain-clouded ;

Earth is a fog.

In wet forests shrouded

Lieth a log :

So lieth weary

My soul within,

My brain so dreary,

So dreary, so weary,

With thinking and sin.

Within and Without.—GEORGE MACDONALD.

THE rector of Irskill returned towards his own parish, his countenance full of satisfaction and expressive of eager and partially gratified curiosity. It still wanted an hour and a half to his dinner-time, so he determined to look in upon Lady Mary Morton, and entertain himself by a further investigation of her affairs. Notwithstanding the heat of the weather, the drawing-

room at Fairlawn was carefully closed, and not a breath of air admitted. Lady Mary reclined in an easy chair, some wool-work lay beside her, but she seemed too inert to hold anything but a bottle of eau-de-Cologne. She was a handsome woman, or, rather, there was latent beauty in her face and figure; but, at the present moment, nothing in her appearance called forth admiration, and if any who met Lady Mary on the rare occasions when she entered into society had become interested enough to think of her at all afterwards, their speculations would have turned rather to what she might have been, than to what she really was. A young lady was seated on the other side of the room, busied in setting to rights some bungled knitting. She rose on Dr. Vansettle's entrance, but did not advance towards him, and when he bustled across to say, in a patronizing tone, as he took her hand, "I hope you don't find the hot weather too much for you, Miss Wallstein?" she merely raised her eyes while replying, "Thank you, I do not," and then busied herself in her task again.

The rector placed himself near Lady Mary, and entered on ingratiating preliminaries, before producing his new gossip, or prosecuting his desired investigation.

“Your ladyship seems very languid!” he exclaimed, sympathetically.

She looked gratified.

“I feel as if I had no life in me, Dr. Vansettle. I can hardly walk across the room. It is an amazement to me how other people can move so rapidly and easily. Miss Wallstein’s rude health is quite oppressive to me.”

The doctor glanced at the lady in question; she did not look up, or betray by the slightest movement, or by any accession of colour, that the remark had reached her. Certainly, no term could have been selected less suitable to her than “rude,” for every act of her life, the smallest and least noticeable, was replete with consideration. Now, as she bends over that most troublesome of tasks—the gathering up of dropped stitches in fine knitting—she has not at all the aspect of being bored. Her dress is of simple material

—white muslin, thickly beset with a tiny mauve figure ; it could only have cost a few shillings, and the crisp, fresh-looking ribbon confining it at the throat and waist had not materially increased the expense ; but all looked so faultlessly clean and bright, the abundant drapery falling in such easy folds, and so setting off the well-developed yet graceful figure, that even Dr. Vansettle's gaze rested on her with pleasure. Little as her appearance indicated that she was bored, still less was there aught of the martyr in her expression. When she lifted those large dark eyes, they told you that she had suffered—nay, more—that she was marked by suffering, and still under its discipline ; but her countenance was full of patience—that acquiescence in God's will which so effectually bends the submitted mind, that small worries are henceforth powerless to annoy. Her features were beautiful in form ; the straight delicate nose, the curved lips, and the pencilled eyebrows had undeniable claims to admiration ; but, lovely as her face was in its settled repose, it was actually glorified by a smile. It was not

only the charm of the lips, nor of the beautiful teeth, which their parting revealed, but it was every feature that glowed in that rare smile. The eyes seemed then to overflow with womanly tenderness. Hers was pre-eminently a smile of love.

Dr. Vansettle was not conscious of such reflections as these on his attention being called to Miss Wallstein's "rude health;" but he did reflect, notwithstanding, and his thoughts might be thus rendered.

"What a pity she is penniless. Lady Mary is too poor and too selfish to give her a high salary, or she might save; and when a hundred or two should be gathered, I should not so much mind doing a disinterested thing, and marrying her. She is a charming little thing, or would be if she had money. But there is a queer pride about her, which I can't make out."

These inner thoughts were no hindrance to the conversation, only they made the rector somewhat absent; and in his absence he suggested an open window as a relief to the lassitude of her ladyship.

"An open window! Oh, doctor, you quite forget my' dreadful tendency to bronchitis; and just now especially I feel I am in great danger, for I hear diphtheria has appeared at Irskill! Miss Wallstein gave me quite a shock a while ago, by proposing a far less risk, that of going into a room with an east aspect, instead of this, where the sun is upon the windows. She meant it well; but young people are so overpoweringly healthy and inexperienced!"

The doctor fidgeted. "You are rendered so super-sensitive by having lived in a hot climate," he said, with desperate daring. It was only a guess, but he saw at once that the arrow had gone home.

Lady Mary started straight up, her eyes flashed, the colour rose to her face; but in a few moments she sank back again, closed her eyes, and exclaimed languidly, "No, you are quite mistaken, my throat-weakness arises from relaxation. Miss Wallstein, please to ring for a glass of water."

The girl glided to the bell; but as she laid her small hand upon it, Lady Mary stopped her. "No,

no, you are too sudden in your movements. I can do without it. Go and fetch those books I have got for parish lending, I want to show the rector my free library."

Miss Wallstein obeyed; the rector cared nothing about the parish, and dreaded Lady Mary on that head; so he at once played his trump card. "I have been calling to-day on our new neighbours, Mrs. Hammerlye and her daughters."

"Indeed! And what are they like? Hammerlye is a name I have never before heard."

"Nor I. But I think they will be an acquisition. The old woman is wide-awake, and on the alert for the main chance. Miss Hammerlye is a showy girl, and has plenty in her, but she has a temper. No. 2 is clever, sarcastic, high-tempered, and a caricaturist; No. 3 is meek and mild, and sings like a seraph: I bet on her as the first bride. I see there is a dead set intended on Elliott's Cray, and I shall recommend our friend Noel to surrender at discretion, for mother Hammerlye is not a woman to be outwitted."

He uttered the latter part of this opinion in a

louder tone, for Miss Wallstein had entered with the books, and there was matter evidently intended to move her. But Joanna Wallstein's calm eyes met his unflinchingly, and her pale cheek gave as little indication of awakened jealousy as of rude health.

They continued to discuss the Hammerlyes for some time, and Lady Mary questioned eagerly about their appearance. The rector could not decide whether they were light or dark, but they were fine girls, and not shy, and the mother in "capital repair."

"A widow, I suppose?" said Lady Mary.

"Why, yes, I suppose so. She does not wear a widow's cap; but one naturally supposes that a married lady, living alone, is a widow."

Lady Mary flinched, and returned to the subject of the parish library. The rector could not escape; and declared he thought the less the poor read, the better for their employers, as it only made them discontented. Lady Mary got excited beyond endurance; she forgot her languor, threw off her shawl, sat quite erect, and her real beauty

and power shone forth. Dr. Vansettle had the worst of the argument; and when he did succeed in effecting a retreat, it was with lowered colours. "What a grand woman she is when fairly roused," he soliloquized, as he passed through the garden. "If she had a household of servants and unruly children to manage, she would be quite well directly, and beautiful too. I would give a dozen of my oldest port to know if her husband is living or not, and why she is not with him."

The old man jolted on towards home, only turning in to the public-house for ten minutes, and coming out with heightened colour, and his hand on the shoulder of mine host. Those calls, *en passant*, were too frequent to be prudent, considering the rector's rotundity of figure. He, however, thought it most unnecessary to allude to such a visit on returning home, so called to his strong-minded, hard-featured housekeeper, "Martha, bring me my dinner quickly, for I have been on my legs all day, and I'm like to die of thirst."

"The dinner has been ready this half-hour,"

bawled Martha, in reply. "So don't go drinking spirit before it comes. It'll be the death of you, see if it isn't!"

Was she not a shocking rude servant? My readers will be sure never to keep such a one in their house for a single day!

CHAPTER III.

AN ADVENTURE.

The knight, approaching nigh, of him inquired
Tidings of warre, and of adventures new;
But warres, nor new adventures, none he heard.

SPENSER'S *Faëry Queen*.

"HOLD back," exclaimed the elder of two men, who were walking together along a park path, and were about to pass through a wicket-gate out into the high road; and, suiting the action to the deed, he drew his friend under the shelter of the park paling, while the rubicund rector of Irskill passed by on his return to his home.

"Safe out of that danger!" ejaculated the younger man, with a low laugh, as he watched the doctor take the turn towards the village. "Your instinct of self-preservation is very strong, Jans; in a former state you must have been a

terrier dog, and Vansettle a rat; your newly acquired gift of reason alone withholds you from hunting and worrying him!"

"The man is repulsive to me; it is only his sly curiosity which distinguishes him from a mere animal. It is penance enough to have to hear his pompous sermons on a Sunday, no word of which he cares to understand himself, though their turn comes round so frequently, that I am beginning to know his stock, few years as I have been afflicted by his ministry. There can be no need to meet him on week days also!"

"You philosophers imbibe strong prejudices, and I shall not be surprised if you take to a tub at last. However, I trust that time is far distant, for my tub would be dismal without your snarling. But what have we here? A horse without a rider!"

Noel Elliott glanced behind him, and seeing some labourers returning from their work, he called to them to catch the horse that was tearing madly towards them. He and his friend pressed on, hoping to gain traces of the missing rider; they had not far to seek.

Lying upon the ground, insensible, if not actually killed, was a tall man ; there was a deep gash across the forehead, but, notwithstanding that, they could see the colourless face was very handsome. He had fallen within a hundred feet of the park gates, so it took but a few minutes to get aid, and the injured man was laid gently on a gate, and carried to Elliott's Cray, while a servant hastened to the village to secure the assistance of the surgeon of the district. The doctor soon appeared, dressed the wound, assured Mr. Elliott that there were no other external injuries, and prescribed absolute quiet. No one was to speak to the invalid, or encourage him to speak, should his power to do so return. Leaving the old housekeeper in charge, Noel Elliott and his friend Jans proceeded to discuss their dinner.

" Please, sir," said the butler, " would it not be well to send to Overstone, to say as how a military gentleman has met with a accident, and is housed with us ? He must be the new capting there, for he has a great moustache, and looks quite a grand gentleman."

"For goodness sake, Duffield, don't presume that every man with a moustache is a soldier or a gentleman. Every conceited prig mounts one now-a-days, and I measure a man's brains in inverse proportion to the hair on his face."

"So far you have some reason on your side, O Socrates. But I can entertain no doubt that the poor fellow is an officer, his dress proves that. We can consider after dinner whether or no it is advisable to send to Overstone to-night; all is done for him that can be, and we might as well wait for a new day before drawing down upon ourselves a herd of locusts in the shape of the newly arrived detachment now in barracks in the self-sufficient little town.

That morning the officers constituting the mess at Overstone had discussed plans for killing their time after the papers had afforded their share of amusement. The officer in temporary command was a Major Manyacre, but he was known to have applied for foreign service, and was seeking no introductions at Overstone. He was a noble-looking man, with a sadness in his tone too often

turning to bitterness; he was respected by his subordinates, though seldom forming any intimacy with them. Captain Welsh was next in command, then Lieutenant Dalzell, Lieutenant Byrne, and Ensign Penrose. We shall see more of Dalzell than of the other officers, so the reader may care to have him more fully described.

Henry Dalzell was now only son and heir to Sir Ronald Dalzell of Braidside, Aberdeenshire. It was a fine estate, but so mortgaged by the present owner, that little more than the title would be handed down to the lieutenant. Shabby as he considered the allowance now made him by his father, he could little guess how difficult it was for the baronet to spare even so much. Henry was Sir Ronald's fourth son, and he had been educated for diplomacy, not for the army. But the elder brothers, inheriting their mother's consumptive diathesis, died in childhood or early youth. His was a stronger constitution; mentally and physically he was a thorough Dalzell, and it remained to him to hand down the baronetcy to posterity, and, as an equally high duty, to add by a monied

marriage to the estates which, by his father's self-indulgence, had been so lamentably encroached upon. Henry Dalzell was what even men call handsome. He had a showy figure and polished bearing, good complexion, and lustrous eyes. And if the men could admit his claim to admiration, what meed of praise might not the ladies be expected to accord him ! In fact he was a lady-killer, and he knew it, and gloried in the knowledge. But he had been early impressed with the necessity of making the most of his personal and social advantages, and he estimated the price of a card that should hereafter carry the name of Lady Dalzell upon it, at a very high figure indeed. So he had learned to play a selfish and cruel game with the fair sex ; keeping his attentions within safe bounds, especially where there was a father or brother to protect the lady, and carrying an unscathed heart himself, fortified by self-love against any disinterested feeling, and utterly reckless as to how many hearts he might break.

Though still young, he had become an habitual trifler, a Moloch of his own creation, to which

all and sundry were to be mercilessly sacrificed.

When Major Manyacre heard him order his horse for a ride, he asked,—

“Have you anything especial in hand to-day, Dalzell?”

“No, nothing particular. I am tired of the immediate neighbourhood, and mean to take a wider range. I go forth as a knight-errant in search of adventures.”

The major regarded him with a look full of sad meaning.

“Have a care, Dalzell; we soldiers get too reckless, and forget the day of account. Remember the adage of the pitcher going to the well once too often.”

“You seem to regard me as a very dangerous and suspicious person, sir.”

“I am double your age. When I see a man continually looking over a hedge, I cease to think it impossible that he may come to pilfer the fruit. Some fruit that is fair to sight is like apples of Sodom when enjoyed. Again, I say, have a care, Dalzell.”

The lieutenant's lip curled scornfully, and he passed on with a careless word, expressive of mere civility, and was very soon riding at a fast pace through the streets of Overstone. When the officers met at dinner Dalzell's place was vacant. Major Manyacre sighed, but no one was anxious, for they presumed that he had gone to a considerable distance, and had, as he intended, started something new. They little guessed that he was lying insensible but three miles off.

But as the night passed and the morning came, and he still did not return, they began to have fears. They were in earnest consultation as to what steps they had best take, when a livery servant arrived with a note addressed to the officer in command of the dragoons at Overstone.

The major perused his note, and then desired that Mr. Elliott's servant should be sent to him. "Poor Dalzell has met with an accident," he said, "but he has fallen into good hands, and is with Mr. Elliott of Elliott's Cray. I shall ride over there at once."

Ascertaining from the groom the exact route to

Elliott's Cray, the major dismissed him, and prepared for his excursion; Mr. Potter, the regimental surgeon, accompanying him. Fortunately, Mr. Stanton, the village surgeon, was in the house when they arrived, and was able at once to explain, in technical terms, what he considered to be the matter, and what had been done, and conducted them at once to the chamber of the invalid. The medical gentlemen then went through the usual form of retiring together for consultation; and as we did not accompany them, we cannot say whether they discussed the chances for the Derby, or the state of the crops, or occupied themselves wholly with the case in hand.

When the gentlemen were ushered into the dining-room where Noel Elliott awaited them, they met with a cordial reception, and Major Manyacre was fully satisfied that all was being done for Dalzell that medical skill and good nursing could effect. It would be unsafe to move the invalid for some time; so the further hospitality of Elliott's Cray was accepted with thanks in his name, by his commanding officer.

Luncheon was brought in, and Noel insisted on his guests partaking of it. As Dalzell was by no means out of danger, Major Manyacre said he should feel it his duty to write to inform his father of the accident; and Noel added a cordial invitation to the old gentleman to join his son at Elliott's Cray. He pressed Major Manyacre to return whenever he could conveniently do so, assuring him of a warm welcome and such hospitality as the house afforded. "You will find things in a rough, old-fashioned style; for there being no lady at Elliott's Cray, I am entirely at the mercy of my old housekeeper. But if you will come over, and take pot-luck, my friend Mr. Jans and myself will do our best to entertain you."

"I will come," replied the major, with a frank smile, which for the moment chased the sadness from his face. "Yours is just the kind of establishment I feel most at home in."

CHAPTER IV.

DEEP WATERS.

We live in *deeds*, not years ; in *thoughts*, not breath ;

In *feelings*, not in figures on a dial.

We should count Time by *heart-throbs*. He most lives

Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

BAILEY.

“WHAT now, old fellow !” said Noel Elliott, as he poked his head into the gun-room, where Jans sat wrapped in deep thought, his daily perusal of the *Times* long since finished. “Are you suffering from an access of spleen, or preparing a more dismal oration than usual upon the certain ruin about to overwhelm us, that you could not spare a thought to the gallant major, nor make an effort to support me in my onerous duties of host ?”

“Talking nonsense, as usual, Noel !. You cannot really imagine that I think I can direct this whirlwind with a breath of mine.”

“ Where, for heaven’s sake, do you see a whirlwind, Jans? You must be endowed with the same qualification possessed by those engaging animals who are able to ‘see the wind.’ What a croaker you are! Is the world on fire, or what danger do you apprehend at present?”

“ There is danger, Noel. We are all too go-ahead. We have annihilated distance, and bridged time; another step, and then!”

“ What then, most sapient philosopher? If all the elements of discord were let loose, England would remain steady. She keeps the key to the great mystery of self-preservation. We are on English ground, and therefore safe. The Queen is popular, and deservedly so. The people are free and happy. The aristocracy are not only moderate in their pretensions, but are bending to the common people, and directing them to high and useful attainments. The national wealth is increasing. You have no real ground for fear.”

“ Do you remember, Noel, what Hood calls the world?”

“ Yes, a wilderness.”

"Ay, with tears hanging from every tree. But you have not yet found it so?"

"No, not I," replied Noel. "There is far more of sunshine in it than Hood gives it credit for. Come out of your tub, Diogenes, and let the sunshine warm your blood."

"Perhaps," answered Jans, not heeding his invitation, "the world may be well enough, but —oh, I see you are not listening."

"Well, no; I am afraid I was not. The fact is, I want you to come out, and to tell me the history you promised of Joanna Wallstein."

"Joanna Wallstein! what on earth, my good friend, has she to do with ethics? You have driven out of my head a whole host of classic recollections, with which I was about to prove Hood's flourish to be——"

"A slander. Yes, I know it is so in one sense. But Hood is a favourite of mine, and I would just as soon you let him alone. So to the biography of the gentle lady, tell me who and what she is?"

"Two questions about a woman, Noel, in the

same breath! You are in too great haste. Calm yourself, pray. Is any one going to run away with her, or are you forming serious intentions regarding her?"

"No, no," replied Noel, laughing. "I can feel an interest in a girl, without falling in love with her. But though I have no 'intentions' you may just as well tell me what you know about her."

"Why, certainly, I might do so," rejoined his tormentor, "but I can hardly reconcile it to my conscience to satisfy mere curiosity. And Joanna is no ordinary girl, she has gone through trials enough to show her true mettle."

"You fan my curiosity, while professing to disapprove it—at first I felt indifferent as to whether you should answer me or no; now I shall insist, as a magistrate, on a full confession."

"Come, then, I will indulge thee, impetuous boy. Sit here, out of the glare of the sun, and as Marc Antony says—

Be silent, that ye may hear.

My first meeting with Joanna Wallstein was on a

Rhine boat. I had hastened on board just as the boat was putting off, and ran down to deposit my desk below. When I returned, I began to examine my fellow passengers, and was at once attracted by the low tones of a rich contralto voice just behind me. A girl of about seventeen and a lady were seated together, the girl's large dark eyes full of wonder at the new scene, and the beautiful objects on either side of the river. But even at that merry age, and with pleasure poured at her feet, the eyes were not dancing, it was a saddened joy that shone in them ; and as I gazed I read truth and tenderness in every sparkling glance. Her delicately formed features, pencilled eyebrows, and dark waving hair charmed me, but in a far less degree than the wondrous eyes, out of which the high soul looked and revealed itself, although the time was yet distant when its full powers should be called into play. The same expression of latent power and beauty peeped forth in her every movement ; she had the faultless grace which she now possesses, though her figure was more girlish, and less

perfectly moulded ; and her voice—oh, the charm of that was beyond my power of description ; it first awakened in me the knowledge of the power of music ! ”

“ Well, Jans, you are a curious specimen—you describe yourself as head over ears in love, yet you seem never to have made an effort to make this charming creature your own. You let her look up to you as a kind of godfather, you sun yourself in her magic smile, and then you betake yourself to your tub again, and chew the bitter cud of morbid philosophy.”

“ I have loved Joanna from the first moment I saw her, but never was in love with her. I have ever felt her to be a child in comparison to myself, and truly the godfatherly relationship is so sweet, that I would not have it otherwise. No ; I have other views for my dear Joanna, but the time is not yet ripe for their development ; but to return to my story :—

“ The lady with her was her mother ; there was little likeness between them, for, as I afterwards found, Joanna’s closest resemblance had

been to her father. We travelled together by boat to Mayence, and then by diligence to Frankfort, and I was interested to observe the power which Joanna's charm exercised on the rough people who came in our way. The commonest service she received and acknowledged with a grace which won all hearts, and when she slipped a gratuity into the hand of a beggar, he delayed examining her gift, as long as his eyes could enjoy the higher boon of gazing upon her. I lost sight of them at Frankfort, but found them again at Brussels. They were passing through to Paris, but were intending first to see the palace of the Prince of Orange, whither I had the pleasure of accompanying them.

“After we had gratified our curiosity at the expense of his royal highness, who, as I think, from a mistaken sense of pride which could not yield to circumstances, foolishly left such valuable property to a nation which had rejected him ; I saw them to their hotel, and I visited them there again before they left for Paris. Again and again I met them thus, in different lands and

under varying circumstances. I was past thirty, and old for my years, so I felt myself a more suitable companion for the mother than for the daughter; I conversed with the former, helping her to watch over her fascinating child, and the intimacy continued to the end of her life, and resulted in the placing of Joanna with Lady Mary Morton. How wonderful it is that there should exist in women so much greater an amount of moral courage than in men! How many of our sex, Noel, shrink by suicide from evils which they leave to be battled out by their widows and orphan daughters; and which might have been well remedied had they possessed the moral courage to struggle and endure as their women-kind do after them!"

"Hear, hear! But to the story, my philosopher; we will defer the moral till the end."

"Her father was one of our merchant princes; one who could count his accumulated riches by hundreds of thousands; and he believed he had it so securely invested, that only a very small portion could ever be endangered by a commercial storm.

“Mrs. Wallstein was a lady by birth and education,—the daughter of an honourable but not a wealthy house, with courage to descend a step in the social scale, when assured that her well-placed affections would secure happiness. The produce of this marriage was one son and one daughter.

“Under circumstances so propitious the children were brought up in the enjoyment of every luxury, and no thought ever crossed their minds, or those of their parents, that did not promise ease and abundance for the future.

“The firm of Wallstein, Filmer, Blake and Co. were traders to Bombay. One partner resided there to represent the house, and, no doubt, their minds

Were ever tossing on the ocean,
There, where your argosies with portly sail
Like signors, and rich burghers of the flood,
Or as it were the pageant of the sea,
Do overpeer the petty traffickers
That courtsey to them, do them reverence,
As they fly by them with their woven wings.

Their wealth was reputed to be enormous, and their credit was equally so. Holders of small

sums felt it a matter of permanency to receive their dividends from such a house, and it had thus a command of capital, such as nothing but the unlimited confidence of the public mind could have afforded.

“ Year after year affairs went on thus, until one morning the world was startled by an announcement in the most popular public journal, that the eminent house of Wallstein, Filmer, and Co. had stopped payment. At first people laughed and disbelieved. The first communication of the disaster was brought to Mr. Wallstein, at the breakfast table, by a junior partner, who had himself seen it in the journal, and had it confirmed by his foreign letters. Mr. Wallstein repaired at once to the City ; as he went he met averted looks or defiant scowls.

“ Finding Mr. Filmer in his private office, he learned from him that the house in Bombay had dared to speculate to an enormous extent, that it had failed by an unexpected turn in affairs, and the whole concern in India and London was ruined.

“ Do you know, Noel, that the more I dwell

upon this event, and upon the grand moral courage displayed by this whole family, the more I bow to the sustaining power of Christianity, so strongly evinced under this trial.

“ Mr. Wallstein returned to the ware-room, now crowded with creditors, and in a calm voice related to them all that had taken place. He set forth the suddenness of the disaster, the blamelessness of the English partners, their desire to furnish every information possible, and to restore every shilling that the wreck of the house afforded ; and he promised, if they would give him one week to arrange his affairs, he would then put everything into their hands.

“ The troubled sea subsided, not another question was asked ; Mr. Wallstein had never been known to fail in a promise. The creditors withdrew in respectful silence.

“ My dear Noel, you have great reason to be grateful to the wise foresight of your ancestors, which has saved you from the possibility of such a reverse. No sudden blow can alienate that chestnut avenue, nor those spreading oaks and tower-

ing elms, your tenure is safe ! But oh, the painful duty to Mr. Wallstein of overhauling the accounts of years, calculating debts and assets, and looking into every minutia of expenditure. His close application achieved a clear statement of accounts in the given time, and all the while he was obliged to hold his own feelings entirely in check !

“ ‘Gentlemen,’ he said, when he had again called the creditors together, ‘I shall not occupy your time with uttering vain regrets. We have gone over our accounts with scrupulous care, and a full statement of our acts and resources is here before you. We give up every shilling into your hands. You know that up to last week I was in Parliament ; to-night there will be a new writ moved to refill my place, as I have asked for and obtained the Chiltern Hundreds, and am therefore no longer a member. I have hastened to take this step for two reasons ; first, because I would show you that an Englishman in debt beyond his means ought not to shelter himself under the privilege of laws, which he, however inadvertently, has broken ; and, secondly, because I shall

now be a poor man. I find our public debts are larger than I anticipated, our private debts are small, and will, of course, be paid in full. In two years we can promise ten shillings in the pound to all, if your patience can last that time ; if thrown into bankruptcy at once, we shall not be able to give more than five shillings. Choose your own course, and take time to consider, I do not wish to influence you—both plans are equally suitable for us, we leave ourselves entirely in your hands.’

“The creditors held counsel, Mr. Wallstein’s address had won their sympathy entirely ; one of the principal ones rose to answer him, and assured him of their full confidence ; he then put it to the company, that the plan first proposed should be accepted, and the motion was carried by acclamation. The Wallsteins set to work like people determined to restore their good name to the place which it had held so long. In a week their town house and furniture was advertised for sale.

“Another week and the house at Ripondale was put up to auction, with its park-like domain, beautiful avenues, and grand pictures ; and within

six months, every penny which could be realized was in the hands of the public treasurer.

“When these events began, Joanna was receiving her last series of lessons with a Madame Decour at Paris, her brother Ernest was touring on the continent, and the parents were alone at home.

“Ernest was recalled at once, in order that he might proceed to India, and assist in the examination of affairs there; and Joanna returned to England to comfort her parents. The creditors made Mr. Wallstein an allowance of three hundred a year, whilst he should be engaged in winding up the affairs; and, taking a small house near Ealing, they lived in strict privacy.

“At the end of the second year Mr. Wallstein was able, partly by his own assiduous care and attention, to declare a dividend, not only of ten, but of sixteen shillings; and the thanks and praise of the creditors were so enthusiastic, that the merchant declared not only that his humiliation was at an end, but that this was the proudest day of his life.

“But, alas! on that very day he received intelligence of the severe indisposition of his son in India. His health had given way under the heat of the climate, joined with his strenuous mental exertion, and no hope was entertained for his life.

“Mr. Wallstein only sustained this shock for a few days. His life was bound up in his son, and his grand aim, during these two years of unremitting labour and self-denial, was to have an unsullied name to hand down to his boy. The over-strained energies gave way under this new sorrow, and he fell into a lethargy from which no entreaties could arouse him.

“Mrs. Wallstein was crushed by this blow, but she survived her husband two years. Their means were narrow, and care preyed upon her, but for Joanna's sake she desired life. She dreaded lest the young spirit should be broken by sorrow and deprivation, and, finding that her income would go further abroad, and even allow of some travelling, she resolved to leave England. Such were the circumstances which caused their presence

in the Rhine boat, on the occasion when I made their acquaintance.

“During the remainder of Mrs. Wallstein’s life I was their only intimate friend; and when the sweet lady was gone, Joanna’s welfare became my principal charge.”

“Did you feel you were doing well for her in placing her with Lady Mary Morton? It seems a hard lot for her!”

“All things considered, it is better than most dependent positions. Lady Mary torments her eternally, but she never insults her. She is so dependent on companionship that she will not visit without Joanna, and this throws her into good society, though only at occasional intervals. The dear girl has inexhaustible patience, indeed it amounts to fortitude, and her unvarying gentleness must, sooner or later, gain possession of Lady Mary’s heart. And last, not least, her being here enables her godfather to keep an eye on her, and advise her whenever she may need it. Joanna has all her father’s mental strength, as she has his personal beauty, and the life of self-denial she

leads is tempering her character to perfection. She has accepted all her sorrows as from the hand of her heavenly Father; she takes the petty trials of the present as His discipline for her; she lives by faith, and she will win her way."

"And what became of the brother? You have neither killed nor cured him."

"Oh, he recovered then, but did not return home. He gained a very lucrative position in trading among the Sikhs, and lived in the interior of India. But, suddenly, his letters ceased; and though inquiry has been made in every direction, no sign of his existence can be found. Joanna thinks that he has been robbed and murdered, and the supposition seems a very likely one. She and I have ceased to speak of the past, except in tones of affectionate memory; we have, by tacit agreement, laid aside speculation. Time has softened her griefs, and, as seen now, they are tinged with a bright light, not of this world, but of that which is to come. I have answered all your questions. Are you satisfied?"

"Fully. I am going to ride—will you come?"

"No, thank you. I shall return to my ethics."

CHAPTER V.

SOCIAL MEETINGS.

That old house of yours which gave
Such welcomes oft to me, the sunbeams fall
Still, down the squares of blue and white which pave
Its hospitable hall.

A brave old house ! a garden full of bees,
Large dropping poppies, and queen hollyhocks,
With butterflies for crowns—tree peonies,
And pinks and goldilocks.—JEAN INGELow.

“PAST twelve, Noel !” said Jans, in a pointed tone, as the latter joined him on the terrace walk, a day or two after the visit of Major Manyacre.

“True, I am a little late. Coming up from the farm I met a messenger from my aunt Bertha, inviting us to a family dinner to-morrow, and I paused to write an acceptance on the back of the note.”

"How did you know that I was not engaged?"

"Because you are such a sulky fellow, that you avoid all engagements, and only go out when I make you."

"You generalize too much. It is not so always."

"No, you go without me to Lady Mary Morton's; that is for the sake of your dear Joanna. But I happen to know that she cannot offer you a counter attraction on this occasion."

"You know nothing. Very likely I am making love to Lady Mary. Will you be best man if I marry her?"

"Yes, and cut you down when you have hanged yourself; which you will do as a certainty within a short period of the marriage. But don't try to gammon me, I can see farther into a stone-wall than that!"

"Whom are we to meet at Sylvester?"

"Guess. A philosopher should arrive at such knowledge by intuition."

"Miss Margaret Elliott."

"Of course. Guess again."

"The rector of Irskill."

"Yes. Try further."

"Mr. Stanton."

"No. Go on."

"My dear Joanna."

"Yes!" replied Noel, triumphantly, examining his friend's face with provoking meaning.

"Indeed!" Jans drawled with indifference.

"And you have really accepted for me?"

"Really accepted."

"I am glad, for I shall see Lady Mary."

"No, you won't. Lady Mary avails herself of her preternatural quinsey, which inflames and swells whenever she wishes to be unneighbourly, so she makes that her excuse. Margaret gave the invitation to them *in propria persona*, and she said, loftily, that Miss Wallstein could go. The poor girl, as usual, proposed to resign the pleasure; but, for once, the lady's humour lay the other way; so she scolded her roundly for imagining her selfish enough to accept such a sacrifice, and the engagement was made."

"Humph! And you feel that all this excuses

you for being half an hour late? Have you not learned that punctuality is the soul of order, and order is the essence of peace?"

"Yes, I know all that, dear old fellow, and I know that peace is peace; so prithee hold thine. I want you to help me in some matters: things are neglected in the house, the old armour is an inch thick in dust, and Dalzell is no longer ill enough to be an excuse for everything that goes wrong."

"Somehow I don't like that fellow. The more his powers rally, the less I draw to him. I wish he had not come to Elliott's Cray."

"And I rejoice that he has come. Both Elliott's Cray and its master are sad blots on God's creation—useless and badly governed, both. I am thankful for any chance that gives us something to do for our fellows. You and I live happily enough, and shall live so for many years, I trust, enjoying the shelter of the chestnut avenue, or of the old thorn where you are accustomed to pronounce, and I to hear, long lectures on ethics; but we do not find our way to practical excellence; the

people on the estate are not taught, or in any way improved ; like the land all is at a stand-still. I should have found my work more easy if I had been born to labour."

Jans gazed in the handsome face of his friend. Noel Elliott was as fine a young squire as you might find within a hundred miles. His father had died in the prime of life, and the heir was indebted to his mother's care alone for directing his education, and instilling the tenderness and sympathy which, united with his natural generosity and mental power, rendered his character one of great beauty. It is thus that the mother forms the man. She gathers her sons in with the soft influence of natural affection, and, in return, obtains an obedience and respect which are for ever afterwards hallowed by the most pure and blessed memories.

The last Mrs. Elliott was of Spanish extraction, and Noel inherited from her an intensity of feeling and expression seldom found with the grey eyes, brown hair, and fair skin of the men of essentially English descent, as was Noel Elliott.

Jans glanced over the stalwart proportions of his friend, and then his gaze turned to the fine manorial residence near which they stood.

The house of Elliott's Cray had been built at many different periods, and possessed no continuity of design. But there was a charm even in its irregularity, and its general aspect was imposing. Difference of taste and aim in the successive proprietors had occasioned this irregularity of exterior, and the interior evinced the variety of idiosyncracies even more distinctly.

One Elliott had been a naturalist, and a quaint limb had been added to the end of the house, on purpose to command a view of an adjacent valley; in this mis-shapen wing an excellent museum of natural history had been located. A second Elliott had made chivalry and antiquarianism his hobby; and his mental likeness was handed down in suits of quaint armour, dating from the time of the lion-hearted king to the battle of Naseby.

Another Elliott had devoted all his energies to literature, and his life was registered year by year

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in rows of well-bound tomes in the handsome library. All seemed to have liked pictures, as there were good family portraits and other paintings of every era in the Elliott history ; but it had remained to Noel's father to collect these, and form them into a picture gallery, the finest in the county. In doing so he felt he was insuring the right of a place and a hearing to his ancestors, who, but for these pictures, might have been forgotten. The genealogical tree of the Elliotts was rooted in past centuries ; one ancestor had distinguished himself in the wars of the Roses ; another had fallen in the civil wars, and the date 1666 was engraved on his memorial tablet.

As Jans glanced first over the master of Elliott's Cray, and then over the house, his mind took a rapid inventory of all the advantages which both possessed, and he answered accordingly,—

“I have taken out a patent for grumbling, and I'll prosecute you if you infringe it. Look at your blessings, man, and thank God for them. If you don't find the path of usefulness now, you certainly would not have found it in a humbler position. I

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agree with you that you don't by any means do what you might do ; but things are not so bad as you represent. The poor are taught, the sick visited, the needy succoured."

"But not by me ! Aunt Bertha's charity and aunt Margaret's activity achieve much ; but their work is rather in the place of the rector's, who will do nothing, than of mine, who would do, but don't see how. The cottages are wretched—to their bad ventilation was ascribable that terrible fever which desolated the neighbourhood last autumn ; the farmers are tyrannical ; half the labourers were thrown out of work during last winter's frost ; and that my good aunts kept them alive is no excuse for my bad government. Oh, there is surely something very rotten in the state of Denmark !"

The two friends proceeded on their pre-arranged excursion to some of the distant farms, beguiling the road by conversation such as we have just listened to ; and the younger expects it to bring forth beneficent results, the moment the high yearnings have passed his aspiring lips ; forgetting

that such yearnings are but as the sowing of the seed, and we must wait for rains to moisten, and air to invigorate, and sunshine to ripen, before we can fairly expect to see the goodly fruit.

Arriving at Sylvester for the usual five o'clock meal, they found that the time had been fixed for half-an-hour later, to suit the rector. But the ladies were ready to greet their nephew—the idol of their lives, the embodiment of all their ambitions for the future. Aunt Bertha was past forty years of age; a slight halt, caused by an accident in early life, and very delicate health, made her look older than she really was; while aunt Margaret, but a year or two in advance of Noel, might easily have been taken for her daughter. To Noel, she was more like a sister than an aunt; and they ever assumed the tone of brother and sister when in private. There was a strong personal resemblance between them.

The drawing-room windows opened on a beautiful garden, which, being situated on a hill-side, was divided into three terraces. The two first platforms were grassed: beds cut for gay annuals

and standard roses in the first; the second, left unbroken for croquet and other games; and the third, set with vegetables and fruit-trees. The divisions between the departments did not consist in ha-ha fences, but in steep grassy slopes, the delight of the children, who were frequently the guests of the ladies, and who luxuriated in sliding or rolling down the steep sward. Miss Elliott was seated in a folding chair beneath a spreading beech-tree, and Noel placed a camp stool beside her, and accommodated himself thereon, asking her eagerly,—“Aunt Bertha, I want you to cut me out some work.”

In the meanwhile the grave Jans had a petition for Margaret's ear—

“Do find me a rose for my button-hole, Miss Elliott. Noel's roses have such a stupid bachelor-look, that I could not make up my mind to sport one.”

“So you come for an old maid's rose instead!” she said, gaily. “Well, I suppose anybody's dulness is less dull than one's own dulness! Come and make your choice.”

Certainly no one could speculate as to what might be Margaret Elliott's style of dulness, for she looked and was a very embodiment of cheerfulness. Hers was at once an enlarged and an active mind; all the parish found a place in her heart, as well as in her sister's; and she was busy from early morning till night, either in making beautiful drawings, teaching in the school, or visiting the sick and needy. Everywhere she carried the light of her good faith and sympathy, she believed people's word; and if on some occasions she was imposed upon for her credulity, the instances were far more numerous in which the truth was told because Miss Margaret always believed what was said, and it was impossible to utter a falsehood with her clear kind eyes upon you.

Aunt Bertha adhered strictly to antiquated fashion. Her bonnet was a bonnet, and she absolutely refused to let her skirts perform the work of brooms in sweeping the streets. There will be more Berthas ere long; pretty ankles are coming into fashion again, and a more moderate estimate of the number of yards requisite for a woman's

gown will be made presently. "Those who live the longest will see the most."

Aunt Margaret attended more to fashion than her sister did, but avoided all extremes. On the present occasion the form of her skirt was indebted more to the abundant folds of her silvery dress than to the steel framework worn below, and the massive coils of her light hair were only tied with a black velvet fillet.

Mr. Jans selected a pale rose, and produced his knife, but asked Margaret to cut it; she presented it with a smile; as she did so, she encountered his eyes, with their deep, searching look, and blushed at the scrutiny.

"You know we are to have our dear young friend Joanna here this evening?"

"Yes, I know it, and am glad. You are very kind to Joanna; it is only with you that she feels quite at home. I should fear the life of fretting might break her spirit, but that she has such perfect trust in your and your sister's sympathy."

"She is a great interest to us. I only wish she could be more with us."

"I wish so too; but we must rest in the assurance that 'what is, is best.'"

"Oh, I do rest in it, Mr. Jans. In early life it is difficult to persuade ourselves that we cannot improve our lot; but when we have lived to see the end of some paths, we feel more and more assured that the right one is given to us."

"I wish you could get Noel to see that. He fancies he could do his work better in humbler circumstances. I hope he is talking it over with Miss Elliott. You and she have the happiness of having found your work."

"It is a great happiness if only we can do it well. However, we must keep on trying, and be content to learn wisdom from failure!"

"Failure! Do you ever fail?"

"Oh, so very often! But we have ceased to be discouraged by it. We find it is the only thing to keep down conceit."

He laughed gaily—a rare thing for him—and looked admiringly into the sunny face beside him. But wheels sounded, and they looked sorry on hearing that Dr. Vansettle had arrived. This

result Jans had expected when he first heard the wheels, and had sauntered with his companion in the direction of aunt Bertha and Noel, so that by the time the doctor emerged from the drawing-room window the four were conversing together in one group.

Joanna had come on foot, and was putting off her hat; Bertha, on ascertaining this, ordered the dinner to be served.

Of course, it could not be allowed to Noel to escort either of his aunts to the dining-room; so, at the first appearance of a filmy cloud of white muslin within the drawing-room door, he entered by the window, and, offering his arm to the fair stranger, led her across the lawn to the rendezvous under the beech-tree, just as the old manservant announced that dinner was on the table.

Dr. Vansettle seemed to feel it slightly indecorous to enter the dining-room by the window, but Jans congratulated Margaret upon anything that should shake the tyranny of unmeaning forms, and Joanna felt the unconventional proceeding as an added proof that, for a brief hour, the shackles were off her spirit.

"I congratulate you, Elliott," said the rector, when he had satisfied the first cravings of his appetite, "on having become a prominent actor in that rare piece of luck, an adventure."

"Really, doctor, I am guiltless of anything that can lay any claim to that title."

"Well, well, we won't quarrel about terms. You have got the job of nursing a wounded cavalier, a sprig of nobility too, or rather a fellow who is entitled to be named in the red book."

"Exactly so, that privilege is extended to the sons of a baronet, but it is not, therefore, a greater privilege to nurse him through an illness occasioned by concussion of the brain. However, I don't wish to appear ungrateful for my mercies, so I will acknowledge to being glad of this chance of doing a good turn to a stranger."

"Ah, well, let him get out again, and do the interesting invalid, with his good parts and expectations, and all the ladies will be in love with him, however coldly the men may talk him over. Haw, haw!"

Noel felt Joanna start, and almost shudder, at

that inharmonious laugh, but she did not raise her eyes, and was consequently ignorant of the curious gaze with which the rector regarded her. No one cared to reply, so he continued his torment.

"Miss Margaret should go up to Elliott's Cray, and assist in the nursing. It would be the very occasion to come forward as a 'ministering angel.' She would become the dignity of Lady Dalzell admirably. Haw, haw!"

"Nonsense, doctor," replied Noel, impatiently.

"Aunt Margaret is too truly a ministering angel to assume the part for an unworthy motive. Lieutenant Dalzell is little more than a boy."

"He is five-and-twenty, Noel, so you need not put out your horns."

"Ten years my junior," rejoined Margaret, with a frank smile.

"Ah, well," continued the rector, "say what you please, he will prove a lady-killer. Sophy Hammerlye will know what to make of him, or the sweet Julia may take captive his heart!"

"You have seen the Hammerlyes, are they likely to be agreeable neighbours?" asked Noel,

glad to turn the subject, for the coarseness of the rector's insinuations to the ladies wounded his sense of the respect due to the weaker sex.

"Very agreeable neighbours, indeed, and very near ones, if they realize their own intentions. Sophy means to be mistress of Elliott's Cray; Emma to be Lady Dalzell, and the fair Julia will marry any other officer that mamma chooses, or even Mr. Jans, though I rather think mamma will keep him for herself. Haw, haw, haw!"

While the Gossip delivered this exordium, he carefully examined the countenances of his hearers. He fixed his eyes fully on Joanna while he divulged Sophy's designs on Elliott's Cray, but he was not gratified by a sign of anxiety in the passive face before him. A slight contraction of the brow, as if her head was aching a little, marked her countenance during all Dr. Vansettle's addresses, but, so far, it seemed wholly independent of their subject-matter. This was patent to two beholders—the tormenting doctor and Noel Elliott.

But if he was disappointed of producing an effect on Joanna, he was amply gratified by the horror

depicted in the countenance of both the Misses Elliott. Margaret's face had flushed deeply, and Bertha looked very anxious.

"Surely," said the former, "Hammerlye was the name of the manœuvring widow who attracted so much observation to herself and four daughters at Southport, when we were there last summer!"

"You are probably right, Miss Margaret. A fine woman, 'fat, fair, and forty.' Dashing girls, gaily dressed, and some temper among them."

"Yes; and the girls have light hair, very elaborately dressed, are neither dark nor light, but have a bold, dauntless air about them."

"Ah, Miss Margaret, you, too, can be severe! Well, I daresay it is the same group. How like you your future niece? She well becomes her yards of false hair, and will look grand in an evening when well painted up; her only failing is her want of colour. Mamma paints of a morning, so Mr. Jans must be liberal in rouge! Haw, haw, haw! Pass the wine, bridegroom elect."

Jans would gladly have thrown the bottle at his head, but he passed it quickly, for the ladies were

leaving the room, and he wanted to open the door for them, that a meaning look might telegraph his disgust.

Bertha was tired, and reposed in an easy chair, while Margaret sat in the window, and Joanna placed herself on a stool at her feet. She smoothed the dark rippled hair, with her quiet, loving hand, and asked,—

“Are you happier with Lady Mary than you were, love?”

“Much happier, my dear friend,” was the reply, in that low tone of thrilling sweetness. “Two things help me; first, that I see much more clearly that the frets are good for teaching me patience; and, secondly, that I become more and more certain that Lady Mary has some heavy grief lying at the root of her fretfulness. She apologized to me the other day for some troublesome thing that she made me do over and over again, and I said that I did not mind it, because I had had such really hard things to bear, that little things seemed truly little to me. ‘Ah,’ she said, ‘would that I could look at sorrow like

that! but it is so much harder to bear sorrows that come from man than those that are direct from God.' She was then silent for a while, but asked afterwards, 'Can you teach me patience, my dear?'

"Poor Lady Mary! I wish we could comfort her. Tell me at any time, love, if we can show her any attention, or do anything to cheer her."

"I will tell you if I see any way, but, so far, I have not been able to find any means of soothing her."

They were still sitting thus, when Jans appeared at the open window—

"Come into the garden, Joanna," he said, "if you are not afraid of the evening air."

She smiled sweetly, and stepped lightly forth in the gray twilight. They sauntered up and down the lawn, speaking softly; she looking like a white cloud by his side. Noel and Margaret came out too, leaving Bertha quiet in her easy-chair, and the doctor having fallen asleep in the dining-room, they were relieved from his vexatious gossip.

Noel left his aunt to the care of his friend, and drew Joanna on, down both slopes, to a grove of firs, from whence they could see the lights of Overstone, the stars of heaven, and the glow-worms under the thorn hedge. He spoke of the beauty of star-light, repeating Longfellow's poem upon the subject, and asking her opinion thereon.

"I admire the poem, but would admire it, like the star itself, from a distance. Sorrow falls terribly short of its purpose, if it makes us self-reliantly strong. Surely its message to us should draw us closer to God, and to our fellows; the true sublimity of strength lies in its blending with tenderness. Sorrow should enlarge the heart to sympathize with young and old, and rich and poor, making it a living link between God and men."

"Most true," he replied, deeply impressed, "I feel with you entirely. To gain such power how readily I would suffer!"

She was leaning against a tree, her beautiful eyes raised to the heavens, her ruby lips parted, as if about to speak again; the delicately chiselled

arm, softened but not concealed by the transparent muslin sleeve, hung at her side, while the other leant against the tree for support. But it was not upon the supple figure, or the ruby lips, that the admiration of the earnest man rested; it was in the steady light of the upturned eyes that he saw, or thought he saw, the ray which should guide him to be and do all that he longed for. Possessed by this thought he remained motionless, and the silence might have continued long, had not Margaret's voice aroused them, as she called her nephew from the upper terrace—

“Noel, Noel, where are you?”

“Am I wanted?” he said, and turned to obey the summons.

“Sir Ronald Dalzell has arrived at Elliott's Cray; the groom has brought the news.”

“Then I must go home immediately. I am sorry, for I hoped to have walked to Fairlawn with Miss Wallstein, but Jans must continue his monopoly of her for another day. I will, however, go and rouse up Dr. Vansettle; he is not a desirable guest to be left with you, my dear aunt,

so I shall make him accompany me as far as our way is one."

In a few minutes Noel carried his point, and presently afterwards Jans took his departure also, with the fair Joanna under his charge.

CHAPTER VI.

A PROMISING CHARACTER.

He turn'd to what he fed on, dust to dust ;
The angel plumes once moulted, grew no more !
The god dwarf'd in him, and his heart was hoary,
Before Time's silver mark had blanch'd his brow.

GERALD MASSEY.

It was past noon on the second day after his accident, before Henry Dalzell regained consciousness. Mr. Stanton had watched him anxiously, and his restlessness had alarmed both him and Mr. Potter, the regimental surgeon, but the threatening symptoms gave way before the evening of the second day, and he awoke as from a dream, eager to know where he was, and what had happened to him.

Mr. Potter allayed his curiosity, and insisted upon silence, and presently he fell into a refreshing sleep.

On the third day he was allowed to see Noel Elliott, and was so far himself as to resume the natural suavity of his manner.

“How can I sufficiently thank you, Mr. Elliott, for your great kindness to a stranger? You have been a good Samaritan indeed! How troublesome good Samaritanism must be!”

“Not at all, so far as I understand its practice. We lead such quiet, uneventful lives here in the country, that any one who breaks their even tenour by a *bonâ fide* adventure is justly regarded by us as a benefactor.”

“Potter tells me that the major wrote to my father. I am glad of that, for the old baronet would have been struck all of a heap, if rumour had conveyed an exaggerated account of the affair. He is not a maudlin affectionate father by any means, but he has no other son to inherit the baronetcy.”

“It would have been most unfeeling and uncourteous to have subjected him to such a shock. I can remember but little of my father, but that little would ensure my tender regard to the feelings of other fathers.”

Dalzell smiled, but there was more sarcasm in the curl of his lip than pleased Elliott, and he turned the subject by expressing a hope that the invalid would soon be allowed to go out a little.

"My aunts have a particularly easy pony-carriage, which they will gladly lend for your accommodation."

"Thanks, many, for all favours, past, present, and to come. I have been studying your landscape, and building romances about the inhabitants of the red and grey roofs to the south and east. Tell me who lives beneath those tall red chimneys and who beneath the slates."

"My aunts occupy the house with the red chimneys, and Lady Mary Morton the other."

"How nice!" was the laughing rejoinder. "Three old maids of a certain age for neighbours! How fully your affairs will be discussed, they will watch your going out, and your coming in, and register every time you fall asleep in church!"

"Lady Mary may condescend to such frivolities, though I hardly fancy she does. But my

aunts are too busily engaged with realities to spend their time in speculations."

"Humph," rejoined Dalzell, as he quietly examined his host from head to foot, "as you like your neighbours, I congratulate you upon having such; but I must own my preference for fair young faces. But each man to his taste!"

The next day Ensign Penrose called, and the moment he was left alone with Dalzell, he exclaimed, "I say, Harry, old boy, who is that lovely girl who gathers wild flowers in the hedges? Airy muslin dress, *négligé* hat, dark eyes that look calm like a deep lake, and so graceful! I like that girl, and would make love to her, but that she is surely your own ewe lamb."

"Hallo!" rejoined his friend, "that good boy Elliott has given me no hint of this! I say, Penrose, you have taken my host's old auntie for a lovely young lady. Mine host has assured me that there are only old maids in this neighbourhood."

"Oh, the sly fox! He is preserving this gem for his own flirting. Say nothing to him, but

cross-examine his valet. I ain't the boy to behave unhandsome to a friend in limbo, but if you were all right, I would run a fair race in this matter—bet high, and not hedge.”

“You are a sweet child, Pen, and shall be rewarded in your turn, but that must not be yet, my boy. Neither its mamma nor its major would allow of an ultimate nailing till you are of age, and you have not experience to keep your foot safe from the toils of matrimony. Apprentice yourself to me, and, in acting as my jackal, you will gain such experience as will make your fortune.”

Dalzell was piqued and interested, and lost no time in summoning the valet. He gave him a tip, and then asked,—

“What families are there in the neighbourhood?”

“Why, sir, there's the Miss Elliotts—master's aunts at Sylvester; and Lady Mary Morton, and her companion at Fairlawn; and Mrs. Wolsingham and Mr. Gregory, at the Court, but that's a good way off; and then there's a sight of fine folk about Overstone.”

“Never mind, Overstone; I shall know enough about that. Are there any nice people about here—young ladies, you know?”

“No, sir; there isn’t much of such like. To be sure, there’s Miss Margaret Elliott: she’s a handsome lady and a comely, and if she isn’t exactly what you would call young, well, neither by rights could you call her old. And there’s Miss Wallstein, as is companion to Lady Mary: she is a pretty lady, and fair spoken; and the servants say she always seems a real lady, though, in one sense, she is in place. Our Mr. Jans brought her here.”

That evening Dalzell began to catechize Jans as to the birth and parentage of Lady Mary,—

“My father surely knows her—I have heard him speak in warm terms of her. I should like to make her acquaintance.”

Jans tried to throw cold water on the scheme, but he did not suspect that Dalzell was on the scent of his dear Joanna; still less that his fancied remembrance of Lady Mary was a ruse; so he let himself be overruled, and promised to escort

the lieutenant thither, as soon as he was equal to a drive.

On the morning after the little dinner at Sylvester, Sir Ronald expressed a wish to ride over to the town, and call on Major Manyacre; so his son declared that he was pining for the open air, and claimed Jans' promise to give him a drive.

When Joanna reached home, she found that Lady Mary's quinsey was relieved. This did not surprise her, for she was accustomed to these sudden recoveries, as soon as the occasion for the illness had passed away. The lady greeted her dependant with some asperity.

"You are late, Miss Wallstein. But I do not wonder that you found it difficult to tear yourself away. Whom have you had? the beau, of course?"

"The rector of Irskill."

"That odious man, with his swollen nose, and apoplectic face! A meddlesome Paul Pry. Who else?"

"Only Mr. Jans and Mr. Elliott."

"Ah, then, if I had gone they would have invited Mr. Staunton or Dr. Quiller from Over-

stone. I am glad I stayed at home. I suppose Mr. Jans was as severe upon his friends as usual?"

"No; Mr. Jans is seldom severe upon ladies."

"Not severe! He is cynical in the extreme—bitter, and often absurd. I detest him, with his cut and dried axioms."

Joanna understood that this was said to irritate her, so she would not seem to notice it.

"Mr. Elliott was called home," she added, "for Sir Ronald Dalzell had arrived unexpectedly."

This diverted Lady Mary for a time, and then she returned to the subject of the party.

"What a slow affair it must have been! Were you not bored?"

"Oh, no! I am so much attached to the Misses Elliott, that I am always happy with them."

"Doubtless, Miss Wallstein, your affection is most romantic and disinterested. Of course, you were well amused! But it was hard for me to be left alone, ill!"

"It was by your ladyship's express desire

that I accepted the invitation," replied Joanna, sadly.

"It was my desire. I could not bear you to be disappointed. It is the way of the world, those who will sacrifice themselves may do so. Do me the favour to ring for Tambour; I am quite exhausted, and if I don't go to rest I shall faint."

Lady Mary retired, and Joanna withdrew to her own room, mortified at the tone which her tormentor had assumed; she sat by the open window, her splendid hair loose, flowing over her shoulders, and waving in the soft moonlight.

She was aroused from her reverie by Tambour, who asked if the bell was for Miss Wallstein or herself.

"For you, Tambour. I rang at Lady Mary's desire."

Tambour slammed the door, and vanished, and Joanna sat long dreaming of the past, and nerving herself for the present; but, as yet, mingling in her reverie no earthly hopes for the future.

Lady Mary had become really interested in a new pattern of knitting, which Joanna had taught

her; and when Mr. Jans and Lieutenant Dalzell arrived next morning she was in her most pleasant mood; and her improved temper, reacting on the philosopher, enabled him to make some polite regret upon her absence from the party the previous evening.

“It would have been a great gratification to me to have joined you, but I was wholly unfit for it, my health is so wretched, especially my throat.”

“It almost makes one wish we were without throats!” said Jans.

“That there might be one vulnerable point less?” asked Joanna, smiling.

“This is a climate so trying to weak constitutions,” continued Lady Mary, “and I cannot hope to escape. Miss Wallstein has a constitution of marble—open windows by day, and starlight walks delight her! It quite takes away my breath to see her hardy tastes!”

Joanna smiled, and Dalzell marked the beauty of her expression. He had been waiting to begin a conversation, and measuring with practised eye the tastes indicated in her countenance; and now

he broke his silence, leaving Jans to listen to further details of Lady Mary's sufferings.

"You are fond of poetry, Miss Wallstein? I wonder if you have seen the works of a new poetic star recently arisen? They have taken my soul captive."

Joanna flashed upon him a look of intense interest. "I have seen no new poetry of late. Lady Mary does not care for it, and I cannot afford to buy books."

"How happy I am to have the good fortune to introduce you to a new mine of delight! Jean Ingelow's poems will harmonize with the under-current of your life; you will find expressed in them impressions and sentiments hitherto undefined in your mind. They abound in intellect, feeling, and religion. They are written on purpose for you."

This was said so earnestly, with such deference of tone, and look of feeling, that the girl was perplexed beyond measure. He seemed to read her soul, and to imply approval, instead of offering flattery. Could Jans have told him her history?

No; he would not have laid her open to a stranger. Then did he see into her soul? Oh, no, Joanna, only soul can look into soul, and that refined man beside you has long since sacrificed his soul on the altar of self-indulgence; now he would sacrifice yours.

"Then do I understand that you will lend me these wonderful poems?" she asked; but her voice was less steady than usual, though certainly not less sweet, and her cheek was no longer pale. Dalzell saw his advantage.

"Yes, I will lend them to you; but they are at Overstone. Let me see, my friend Penrose will bring them to you." He paused, as if reflecting, then added, in a low voice, as if to himself, "No, Pen had better not *bring* them. An affectionate fellow—will go overhead and ears at once—and his mother committed him to my care." He looked up from his reverie, apparently unconscious that he had spoken audibly, and added, "Penrose will bring them to Elliott's Cray to-morrow, and I will get Mr. Jans to send them on to you."

"Thank you very much," she replied ; but she was blushing deeply, and annoyed with herself for doing so.

He continued to talk, that he might relieve her confusion.

"I fear I have yielded to the bad habit of marking books. I must crave your indulgence for that. I am so led away when I meet with sentiments that are noble and true, that I forget the marks of my pencil will be more patent to others, than the throbs of my own heart."

"It is a great temptation to me to mark a book," rejoined Joanna ; "it seems like a word of sympathy and gratitude to the author, as if one could give him the satisfaction of seeing that his chance arrow had gone home. Of course, I never do such a thing in a borrowed book, nor in any of my own that I mean to lend. Marks reveal too much of one's mental cares and aspirations."

"Don't scruple to mark mine," said Dalzell, in a low tone ; "I suspect I should hardly know your marks from my own : hearts with the same craving find refuge in the same aspirations. Nay,"

he added, "I do not only give you *permission* to mark, but I *enjoin* you to do so, that, in an hour of trial, I, seeing your footsteps, may take heart again."

Joanna replied only by an assenting look, and Dalzell turned to claim acquaintance with Lady Mary in his father's right.

"Oh, yes," said Lady Mary, with a start, "I knew Sir Ronald, but he will have forgotten me."

"Indeed that would be impossible; my father is too chivalrous to forget one he so much admired."

Lady Mary looked steadily in the young man's face, and said, with a grave dignity, that transformed her into another and a far superior being, "Tell your father, Mr. Dalzell, that I earnestly wish that nothing should recall the past. I shall be glad to see him—and my heart warms at the thought of greeting a familiar face—but he will do me the favour to forget that I am not a stranger."

The officer bowed, and the conversation flowed on in generalities; Lady Mary returning to her

querulous tone, and Jans talking earnestly of education and parish matters to Joanna. It was only when Dalzell became really fatigued that he rose to depart, leaving behind him a most pleasing impression.

CHAPTER VII.

AS THE OLD COCK CROWS SO LEARNS THE YOUNG.

A coke they hadden with hem for the nones,
To boil the chickenes and the marie bones,
And poudre marchant, tart and galingale,
Well coude he know a draught of London ale.
He coude reste, and sethe, and broile, and frie,
Maken mortrewes, and wel bake a pie.—CHAUCER.

SIR RONALD DALZELL was a man of experience and refinement, and his presence among the circle assembling round the hospitable board at Elliott's Cray, completed its attraction. Elliott had secured the presence of Major Manyacre; offering first, as a lure, to get his aunts to preside, that some of the ladies in the neighbourhood might be induced to grace the party with their presence; but the major had petitioned against this project

with such strange earnestness, assuring Noel that he had a private and very painful reason for avoiding ladies' society, that Noel had at once abandoned all thought of bringing the ladies to Elliott's Cray on this occasion.

Sir Ronald had the fine features and aristocratic air which rendered his son so dangerous. He had travelled in almost every region of the world, dwelling long enough here and there to become *au fait* at the manners and customs of the people, and to enter into the spirit of their nationalities. He had lived as much in France as in Britain, and was as familiar with the field-sports there as at home. In Africa he had pursued larger game, and that in less *recherché* company. He had spent several years in India, and had twice wandered among the prairies of America. In short, he was a denizen of the world, knew its fair and its foul side, had gathered his experience in the greatest of schools, paying for it as men usually pay, who pander to passion and self-indulgence, and whose love of pleasure wastes both life and goods.

Now, though far advanced in years, he was a shrewd and vigorous worldling, ready to grasp at anything which promised well for self-interest, but cautious in incurring obligations, from experience of their dangerous tendency. He was endowed with a polished suavity which corrupt associations had failed to deteriorate, and a dignity which forbade familiarity and commanded respect as surely as high moral worth would have done.

Mr. Stanton and Mr. Potter were of the party, and against all expostulation from Jans, Noel had insisted on inviting his abhorrence, the rector of Irskill; so most of the educated classes of the community were well represented at that snug dinner-table.

Old Dobbs, the housekeeper, was in her glory. The well-thumbed cookery-book, forming with a Bible and the "Pilgrim's Progress," the library of the still-room, was ransacked for time-honoured receipts, and the culinary glory of the Cray was not doomed to lower its colours on this occasion. Never had venison been served in a state of more

intense heat, never had the glaring eyes in the peacock's tail waved more luxuriantly over its trussed remains; never had pastry been so air-like, nor macaroni so savoury, as when the Dalzells were received as honoured guests in the ancient dining-hall of Elliott's Cray.

When the eatables had been discussed, and introductory formalities had merged in more genial intercourse, when the fine old wines had circulated for a while, and the general comfort made every countenance radiant, then stories were told, and hair-breadth escapes and adventures related, which produced excitement and mirth. Even Jans, the philosopher and cynic, forgot his exalted Platonism, and added his quota to the general stock of anecdote and repartee, speeding his arrows to the common target.

Sir Ronald was once more, lasso in hand, pursuing wild horses; the major fought his battles over again; the two medical men furnished absurd stories of hypochondriacs, and wonderful accidents, with their triumphant cures; the rector related triumphs of gastronomy, and Noel had

adventures in field-sports to contribute; how could Jans remain silent?

Mr. Stanton was a man of pleasing exterior and engaging manners. From childhood he had lived at Irskill, had married there, and there interred his wife, the mother of his four delicate little children. He had good intellectual powers, and this made him a fair practitioner, although his heart was not in his work. To-night he is the gayest of the gay, tells his stories in a style not to be outdone even by Sir Ronald, and seems the soul of geniality; but to-morrow, as he drives through the plantations of Elliott's Cray, he will curse his fate that he was not born a squire, bemoan his lonely condition, and long to "throw physic to the dogs." Like many another of our human brothers, Mr. Stanton misses happiness, for want of courage fairly to accept and adapt himself to his position. He has a large practice and a good income, is a presentable man, with a cultivated mind. He pines for sympathy, and the domestic comforts which only a true-hearted woman can subordinate, and he knows more

than one lady among the families of his patients, whom he would fain place as mistress to adorn and rejoice his house. But he is too selfish to marry disinterestedly, and too proud to risk a denial, so he alternately presses the hand of Joanna Wallstein after entertaining her with witticisms, and that of Margaret Elliott, every rose in whose garden might consider itself the doctor's patient, so carefully does he attend to the well-being of each.

As year by year passes and leaves Mr. Stanton's house unblessed, he finds more and more a resource for his powers in local diplomacy. He makes the character of each person in his district a special study, and having thoroughly learned their strong and their weak points, he acts towards them accordingly, and becomes counsellor-general, seldom failing to bear a prominent part in all the concerns of the parish.

On the present occasion, amid all the mirth, he is taking the measurement, intellectual and moral, of the baronet, and the gauge thus obtained will aid him in reading the qualities of

the son; the observations he makes, decide him to restrict the conversation to its present general tone as long as possible, and, at any rate, to turn the discussion off from the ladies of the neighbourhood, especially the beautiful dependant of Lady Mary, whom the doctor hopes entirely to keep out of the way of either Dalzell.

So, when the gentlemen grow tired of adventure, and discuss the interests of the day, when farming and gardening, hunting and shooting, have become stale subjects, and Dr. Vansettle begins to open out his budget of gossip, Mr. Stanton interposes his ready tact, and avoids all allusion to Joanna by drawing the rector on to talk of the new Overstone constellation, the family of Hammerlye.

“We are in duty bound to settle them among us,” he said; “they have thrown themselves in such an insinuating way upon our protection. But how are we to agree? Here we sit, six single men, and there are but four Miss Hammerlyes!”

“And the widow makes five,” suggested Noel, mischievously.

"Six," exclaimed Henry Dalzell, "a widow always counts for two."

"The eligible gentlemen count but five," said Jans; "I withdraw from the list."

"You are prudent," rejoined the rector, who hated Jans; "I don't fancy even the widow would care to become Mrs. Jans."

"Perhaps she has hopes of becoming Mrs. Vansettle, or is already engaged to do so."

"No, no, Mr. Jans, when one is making a change, one may as well take the best as the worst; my taste is for youth as well as beauty."

All eyes glanced at the bloated appearance and animal expression of the rector, and laughed heartily at his absurd conceit; the laugh of the more thoughtful of the party merging in a sad regret, that such a man should still disgrace the Church, and render its sacred ministrations futile.

Mr. Stanton bent on him a look of withering scorn, and almost turning his back to him, entered into conversation with Noel. Jans moved his chair in the same direction, and Dr. Vansettle took the opportunity of quickly filling and

re-filling his glass. Mr. Potter persuaded Henry to retire, and then he conversed in a low tone with Sir Ronald and Major Manyacre on the health of the lieutenant. Dr. Vansettle, or Father John, as he was often playfully called, continued his attentions to the bottle, till sleep stole over him, and his loud snoring drove the rest of the party from the room.

"How I wish we could marry this intrusive widow to Vansettle," said Jans to his two friends.

"Why are you so sanguinary against the widow, Jans?" asked Mr. Stanton. "She has done none of us any harm, why are we to take against her?"

"No harm!" ejaculated Jans. "Do you call it no harm to bring a quartette of designing women into a neighbourhood? I call it as bad as a raging pestilence."

"Nonsense, Jans!" said Noel. "For my part I wish there was a law compelling us all to marry. I sincerely believe that the compulsory marriages would be fully as happy as those made from choice; or, as is much more frequently the

case, from accident, and it would smother the crowd of harpies in the shape of fiftieth cousins, who hang about wealthy relatives, with ever an eye to their inheritance, like birds of prey hovering over a battle-field, for the sake of to-morrow's desolation."

"Then, in your legislation would you allow no choice?" asked Stanton, with a sly look.

"Within very narrow limits. I would let you have a week wherein to choose, and at the end thereof the parish officer should choose for you."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "A good deal might be done in a week, if the lady were compelled to say 'yes.' I suppose you would so arrange it?"

"No, I would not. For a week she might say 'no,' and then she also must abide by the choice of the government official."

"Well," rejoined Jans, "I believe the plan would answer. I am very sorry for the old maids; many, if not all, of their faults are in consequence of finding no suitable sphere for their powers. They become interfering from having

no adequate occupation, fretful and querulous because of their hearts being empty. Such women, with husbands to humour, and children to work for, would become models of female excellence!"

"Hear, hear, a champion of old maidenhood. Jans, the O. M.'s shall give you a testimonial!" exclaimed Mr. Stanton.

"Jans is like many a parson demonstrating the difference between theory and practice in his own person. Let us marry him to Lady Mary, and test his Platonism!" said Noel, mischievously.

"Do you regard Lady Mary in the light of an old maid?" asked Mr. Stanton, with raised eyebrows.

"Well, I suppose, not exactly. Only it is all a mystery, one does not know how to regard her."

Mr. Stanton compressed his lips, and looked as if he *could* unravel the whole mystery, but did not feel himself at liberty to do so. "I have **great** sympathy for her," he said, "and wish **sincerely** that the law might grant Mr. Jans the

privilege of comforting her ; but I fear the law wills it otherwise at present." He glanced round, and seeing that the other guests were conversing at a great distance, he said in a low tone, "I don't like your guests, Elliott ; both father and son are dangerous. No wolves are so voracious as those who wear sheep's clothing. Have an eye upon them."

Major Manyacre sat rather listening to the conversation of Sir Ronald and Mr. Potter, than taking a part in it. He, too, was making his observations, and his countenance became sadder, and his thoughtful eye fuller of gloom as he listened ; to him, the reflection occurred, "Dangerous lack of principle. I will watch them." He determined to warn Noel Elliott, on the first fitting occasion, and if no opportunity should occur that night he would quickly find another.

Henry Dalzell had not retired to rest, as his medical man had advised him to do. He was busy in his room, pencil in hand, reading and marking a new volume of poetry, many of the pages of which he had to open with his paper-

knife. A parcel of books lay on the table, the string of which he had cut immediately on coming to his room, and from time to time he took a dried flower or leaf from these, and laid them as markers in the new volume. His friend Penrose had been over to inquire for his health and happiness in the morning, and to him he had given the commission to despatch his books in the major's carriage in the evening. Subsequent inquiry had put him in possession of the fact that Dr. Vansettle must pass Fairlawn on his way home that night, so he was preparing the promised parcel for Joanna.

Having marked all the high-souled passages he could find, and laid in the memorial flowers as we have seen, he took paper and pen, and wrote :—

“DEAR MISS WALLSTEIN,—

“I SEND you my congenial companion, the book of poems ; judge me gently, and do not deem me weak if you see signs of yearnings and cravings that men seldom own to. I trust you fearlessly, for I read in your truthful face, yes—

terday, a nobility of nature which would render it impossible to you to hold me up to ridicule. Of course you will keep the volume in your own room. Please do not lose the flowers, they are mementos of many a lost joy, of many a peaceful hour which can never return. My father and his friends are revelling below; their thoughtless mirth makes me sick at heart—happy those to whom father is a holy name!

“Yours faithfully,

“HENRY DALZELL.”

The note and parcel were despatched to the rector's groom, who promised to drop them as desired, and pocketed his *douceur* with perfect satisfaction.

Henry Dalzell's letter, like his character, was false in its under-tone, yet many of his assertions were founded on fact. The dried flowers were memorials of many an exciting flirtation, and but too closely typical of the blighted hearts and ruined lives of the human blooms which he had so ruthlessly plucked. Yet there were extenu-

ating circumstances even in his life of youthful depravity. His father's reputation was laid open before him, wherever he went. He had gone forth into the world unwarned, unarmed. Sir Ronald had had no care for his son's character, and hitherto he had formed an exception to the generality of fathers, who, if roués themselves, still strive to warn their sons off the path, the danger of which they know by bitter experience. But Henry Dalzell had never been shown the Scylla or Charybdis of life, and had had no thought of steering his bark between them. The early loss of his mother had robbed him of the maternal influence which might have calmed his excitability, and afforded him sympathy in disappointment. He was, in fact, like a ship at sea, water-logged and left afloat, to be picked up and towed into any harbour that suited the fancy of the adventurer who should have the courage to encounter difficulty for the gain of the salvage.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOODLAND SCENE.

How sweet it is, when mother Fancy rocks
The wayward brain, to saunter thro' a wood!
An old place, full of many a lovely brood,
Tall trees, green arbours, and ground flowers in flocks;
And wild rose tip-toe upon hawthorn stocks.

WORDSWORTH.

JOANNA had wished Lady Mary good night, and was sitting by her open window, gazing forth into the moonlight, when the housemaid brought her Lieutenant Dalzell's parcel. When the maid had retired Joanna lit a candle, drew down her blind, and proceeded to read her note. For the last three years the poor girl had led a very lonely life! lonely at least in heart. She would have reproached herself with ingratitude to her kind friend, Mr. Jans, had she acknowledged as much

to herself; but acknowledged or unacknowledged, there was an aching void in that large heart—a yearning for sympathy, and the power to aid, in that truly womanly nature, which required all her fortitude to keep in abeyance.

Can we then wonder, still less blame her, if she sat again at the moonlit window till far into the night? her heart swelling, as again and again she repeated to herself the thrilling words in the soldier's letter, and her wonderful eyes rendered more beautiful by the tears of glad emotion which gathered slowly under their drooping lids.

In the morning she made a strong effort to act openly, and show Lady Mary the note; it cost her much to do so, for she expected ridicule and sarcasm to follow. But Lady Mary returned it to her very quietly—an expression of unwonted kindness beaming from her eyes.

“Take care, my dear. Men are false and fickle.”

“Is that a general rule, Lady Mary?”

“Yes, my dear, with a few exceptions. This young man may be one of them. I confess I am predisposed in his favour.”

Joanna smiled her most bewitching smile; it never occurred to her that the prestige of the baronetcy expectant procured him the privilege of the lady's confidence.

If we were to assert that Lady Mary was genial and sympathetic all that day, we should be exceeding the limits of truth, but we can safely say that she had sympathetic flashes, and was less trying than usual. Joanna felt most grateful for this implied sympathy.

"You look pale, my dear," she said, towards evening; "the heat of the room tries you. Go out and take a walk, and bring back some flowers for the vases."

Joanna gratefully acceded to her wish. Solitude and the sympathy of mother Nature's calm face would be such a boon to her. She threw on her hat and scarf, and taking Jean Ingelow in her hand, passed from a little door in the garden-walk into a green lane, the banks of which became deeper and deeper as the path ascended. She progressed slowly, and was approaching a wider part of the lane, close to the place where it

merges in an extensive wood, reading one and another choice poem from the book in her hand, or letting her eyes rest dreamily on the flower-spangled banks, or the hairy caterpillars, which here and there were venturing to cross the great desert of the lane, to find more congenial pasturage beyond. On the top of the banks grew thin lanky fences, formed of thorn, or sloe, or hazel-bushes, with here or there a young elm-tree, attempting a loftier growth. Ever and anon the wild clematis availed itself of the straggling branches as a roof-tree, upon which to construct its thatch of interwoven branches and fragrant blossoms, suspending fanciful garlands from its ceiling, or throwing triumphal arches across the way. Beneath one of these natural bowers three children were playing. They had gathered their pinafores full of wild flowers and rushes. One had woven a rush-basket, and she sat on the ground, and, assisted by one companion, interwove buttercups, and wild hyacinth, and the rose-coloured campion, into the meshes of her basket; while the third, the infant belle of the

village, supplied the weavers with flowers as they needed them, and had found-time to coil a branch of clematis round her own head, happy that it imprisoned the dishevelled locks which the fresh breeze would otherwise have blown tormentingly into her eyes. As Joanna approached, reading and dreaming, the children evidently feared for their treasured basket, and put their hands protectingly before it, looking up appealingly in her face, lest she should carelessly put her foot upon it. She was too pre-occupied to see the children till she was close to them, but then the full beauty of the picture flashed on her artistic mind. A frank sympathetic smile assured the little ones of the safety of their treasure, but that did not sufficiently express her kind feeling for them. "What a pretty basket—what lovely flowers," she said; "clever little girls, to find such pretty things; happy little ones, to have found out how to enjoy them!"

She laid her hand on their heads, adjusted the clematis wreath, smiled again right lovingly, and was passing on, when a sound among the

ushes, on the high ground to the left, attracted her notice, and she saw Mr. Dalzell pushing through the entanglement.

“I have been watching you for some time, but could not find in my heart to break up so exquisite a tableau. Oh, for the pencil of an artist to immortalize that group!”

He gazed upon her with unconcealed admiration, and well he might, for feeling was awakened, though, as yet, it was but the surface stratum of feeling, yet even that gave a tint as of the monthly rose to her cheek, and a trembling tenderness to her eye, which would have won homage from a less susceptible imagination than that of Henry Dalzell. Her eyes fell beneath his entranced gaze, she nervously withdrew the hand he had taken, and was still holding, and, turning towards the children, she said,—

“Why do you not sketch them? I see you carry a drawing-pad and pencils.”

“Pooh! I can only sketch inanimate objects—lifeless landscapes; if I essay an animal even, it looks like a boy’s hobby-horse.”

"Shall I draw the children for you?" she said, holding out her hand for his portfolio.

"Oh, if you would," he exclaimed in rapture; then added sadly, "but by far the loveliest figure in the group will be wanting!"

He dragged a piece of wood to a suitable place, told the children to remain quiet, and stood beside her watching her work. His close attention made her hand tremble, and she saw his eyes fix upon it. This embarrassed her more, for she felt he must guess his power to call forth her emotion. He was at the moment merely noticing the delicate colour and proportions of the artist-hand, but he did not fail presently to note how unsteady it was.

As the sketch progressed he began to think he was not making the best of his opportunity, he could not advance his suit with those children staring at him and the object of his admiration.

"Never mind finishing the sketch. I shall value that outline more than an elaborate picture by Reynolds or Vandyke. Continue your walk now; you were going into the wood."

"Thank you, Mr. Dalzell, I will add a few more touches to the picture. I do not intend going into the wood this evening; the light is already waning."

"But I thought you liked the sombre light. Lady Mary said you were fond of walking by starlight."

"That is only when I am quite alone," she replied, in a low voice.

"But it is all the more suitable and agreeable with a companion. Come," he added, gently possessing himself of the portfolio, "we will only go a little way into the wood, and then I will take you home."

She could look into his face now, for she felt he was pressing her to an imprudent measure; one which he would not have advised had her father or brother been at hand to call him to account and shield her.

"I will not go into the wood this evening, Mr. Dalzell," she said, gently, but with great firmness; and taking the hand of the little flower-crowned child, she added, "Little Rosa will go

home too, and Bessie and Mary will follow with their basket. Will Rosa give me some of her flowers?"

The child blushed with gratified feeling as she gave speedwell and wild roses to the pretty lady, and Dalzell bit his lip, and accompanied them down the lane in silence.

"Have you read any of the poems, Miss Wallstein?" he asked, as they reached Fairlawn.

"Oh, yes, several; I like them exceedingly"—she was going to have said more, but checked herself.

"Fool that I am!" he exclaimed, mentally, "I have aroused her reserve by that foolish effort for a stolen march." Then he added aloud, in a saddened tone, "I did not expect that Miss Wallstein would have been so wedded to conventionality; if I had asked her to abstract Lady Mary's purse for me, she could not have resented my request more deeply."

Joanna laughed merrily.

"Oh, indeed, you are mistaken; I feel no resentment at all." She paused, and then said, in a

tone expressive of much feeling,—“I felt obliged to speak and act somewhat abruptly; I dare not let you continue your persuasions.”

His face was beaming now, and he would gladly have annihilated little Rose and her two companions, for they had reached the garden-gate; but Joanna held the small hand fast.

“You will come in and see Lady Mary?” she said, opening the gate.

“No, not to-night; I will call to-morrow.” He spoke with a meaning look.

“But come in now, nevertheless,” she said, earnestly.

Again he gave her a look, as if enjoining silence.

She replied to it in her usual low musical key, but with steady emphasis,—

“I shall tell her that you walked with me.”

“More fool you!” rose to his lips, but he only said, “Do as you please,” and took his departure.

On the morrow he was preparing to start on his chivalric errand, when his father asked his com-

panionship, telling him he wanted to call on Lady Mary Morton.

“ All right, sir ; I am at your service,” was the reply ; the dutiful son not considering that it concerned his father to know that he was going there in any case.

Sir Ronald and Lady Mary met as a man and woman of the world, courteous, conversable, and easy, and avoiding, by mutual consent, all allusions to the possibility of their ever having met before. Henry conversed apart with Joanna, and drew her on to speak of the poems that pleased her, especially the passages he had marked. He played his cards carefully, and won upon her regard.

In the midst of the visit, Mrs. and Miss Hammerlye were announced. Mrs. Hammerlye devoted her attention to Lady Mary and the baronet, and Sophy hers to the interesting convalescent. She inquired most tenderly for his health, was full of concern for his untoward accident, longed to congratulate Mr. Elliott upon the good fortune which had sent him so charming an office as to domicile and minister to a wounded

soldier, and insinuated that Mr. Dalzell was also to be congratulated in having fallen into the hands of a person so delightful as she was given to understand Mr. Elliott was. Her glittering eyes danced as she played out her best cards, and she regarded Joanna as wholly beneath her notice. She upset an easel with her obtrusive crinoline on her first entrance; but Joanna only gathered the scattered articles very quietly together, and then occupied herself with some simple crochet work. Lady Mary listened attentively to the conversation between Sir Ronald and Mrs. Hammerlye, and to that between the fair Sophy and Henry, now and then interpolating something, but generally remaining quiet.

Mrs. Hammerlye, though so much engaged herself, was enough of a general to have also an eye on Sophy's warfare. She did not altogether like the unobtrusiveness of Joanna. She knew that quiet workers were generally attentive listeners; so she felt it worth while to turn some of her artillery upon her.

"You are fond of crochet, Miss Wallstein?"

"Not very; but it saves me from being idle when more stirring occupation would be inconvenient."

"Do you read much? I suppose you see all the new books?"

"No, indeed, we do not. We are like a place on a tidal river very far from the sea, and the fashions in books or dress, like a belated tide, only reach us when they are going down elsewhere."

"A pretty simile," said Sophy, sarcastically; "is it original?"

"Ah, no. I believe I have it from Mr. Jans. I cannot say whether the copyright be his or no."

Sir Ronald felt tired of the small talk, so rose to take his leave. Henry could only press Joanna's hand at parting; any word of interest he would have felt unsafe with his father's eye upon him.

"Henry," said the baronet, "you must be careful what you are about with that girl. She is a beauty of the first water, just the thing I should have gone mad over twenty years ago.

But she is a bad speculation; the worst possible, I should say—too good and too bad.”

“ I don’t understand you, sir.”

“ Don’t you ! You are either wilfully stupid, or this fall has injured your brain. Plainly, then, I mean this : the girl is too poor for you to marry ; your whole fortune depends on a rich bride.”

“ Leave me alone for knowing the value of money, sir. I have been brought up in a good school for that. Penury teaches one to love gold.”

“ You have never known *penury*, Henry ; but let that pass. If you don’t think of marrying the girl, I don’t care ; only she is too well esteemed by Lady Mary and others for you to take her to the continent with any safety. And, by Jove, the girl is so attractive, you might even go and fall in love with her ! ”

The young roué laughed aloud.

“ Never fear for my heart, sir ; that has been checked in its growth from the cradle. I could not now afford so embarrassing an appendage.”

“What a worthless villain you are, Henry!” exclaimed the old man, involuntarily; and the young one accepted the exclamation as a compliment.

On reaching home, they encountered Elliott and Jans, walking backwards and forwards on the terrace. The former accosted Sir Ronald.

“My aunts have been here in your absence, proposing a pic-nic to Boulston Priory to-morrow. I have accepted their invitation provisionally; but of course the decision rests with you.”

“I am quite willing for the excursion,” the baronet replied, gaily, “and Harry will be the better for the change. We shall both hold ourselves at the service of the Misses Elliott.”

Jans had sauntered on with the lieutenant.

“You have been to Fairlawn?” he asked, uneasily.

“Yes, it is pleasant to go there. Lady Mary, though full of strange humours, has enough of thorough good breeding about her to make her society agreeable: and Miss Wallstein is a gem. She speaks of you as a kind of guardian: pray

tell me something about her ; she has surely not lived long in her present capacity ? ”

“ What do you mean by *capacity* ? ”

“ Her dependent position. I suppose she is Lady Mary’s hired companion ? ”

“ Yes. She is penniless, and has only her own exertions to depend on.”

“ Just so. But she does not look like one brought up to such a life. I can see in her eyes that she has a past history, in which there was abundance of sunshine and beauty. I gather as much even from hints she lets fall. She has sketches of Switzerland which she looks upon with more affection than that with which she would regard them merely for art’s sake.”

Jans looked worried. “ She travelled there with her mother before she engaged herself to Lady Mary. I met her first abroad. She was born an affluent lady ; but all that is past.” Jans hoped that Dalzell would be disenchanted by this description, but he persevered in his tormenting examination.

“ I have seen but little of Miss Wallstein ; but that little induces me to think highly of her.”

“Take care you don’t fall in love with her,” said Jans, in desperation. “Take care that your newly recovered health and spirits do not lead you into a course you will afterwards repent!”

“Leave that to my judgment, Mr. Jans. I am not inexperienced, and have long since learned that I must not indulge in the luxury of falling in love.”

Jans regarded him suspiciously, as the thought passed through his mind, “God forbid that you should add to your sapient experience on that head in our near vicinity!” but Dalzell disarmed him by adding, “Such people as Miss Wallstein do one good. She is sensible and agreeable, and her high principle is infectious. I regard intercourse with her as a privilege.”

“You cannot think of her too highly,” eagerly replied the faithful Jans. “But mind what you are doing, for we may slide into serious engagements imperceptibly, and may find ourselves in deep water when we were only intending to dabble in the shallow.”

“My father taught me all that very early in

life. He did not give me many lessons, certainly, but that was one. And then I have bought experience for myself."

"If you have bought it, you will remember it," rejoined Jans, in a more genial tone than he had before used to the lieutenant. "But beware, notwithstanding, lest you should unwittingly graze your own happiness, or that of my dear little Joanna."

CHAPTER IX.

WEB-MAKING AND UN-MAKING.

Kill me, sir,
Pray kill me; yet you need not, your unkindness
Has left your sword no work.—DRYDEN.


THE day for the pic-nic dawned bright and clear, and the usual circle forming the Elliott's Cray society prepared to start for the rendezvous in genial spirits. For the first time for many a long year Joanna Wallstein paused a few seconds in selecting which of her clean bright dresses would best become her: she decided on one of blue and white, and with a white muslin mantle, and a very simple white straw hat, she was readily equipped.

Noel Elliott took the reins from the hands of his coachman; but before the groom let go the horses' heads, he said, "Should Major Manyacre call, tell

him we have gone to rusticate at Boulston Priory, and ask him to ride round and join us—tell him it will only take him three miles out of his way.”

Boulston Priory had been, in past years, a religious house; it belonged originally to the Grey Friars. It was well calculated, from its deep seclusion, for the purpose for which they had chosen it.

Soon after the Reformation, the Priory and its adjacent lands passed into the hands of Sir Guy Warren, in whose family it descended for generations; but by various intermarriages it had lapsed to a different set of people, who cared not to live in the restored portion of the ruin, nor to keep up the trim appearance of the place; so the reception-rooms had a gloomy air, and all around looked chill and neglectful. An old woman lived in the place as housekeeper; and she hailed the arrival of our party with delight, sure that they would be worth a good sum to her. She eagerly threw open the picture gallery and reception-rooms, and offered her services to boil potatoes and get a repast ready in the great hall.



"Have you a bell which can be heard in the grounds?" asked Noel.

"Oh, yes, sir. There is a bell for calling the gardener; it is heard all over."

"That is well. You see, my good woman, I am expecting a gentleman to join us; but being a stranger, and the grounds extensive, he might seek us for hours in vain. When he comes, you must ring that bell loudly, and I will at once return to receive him. His name is Major Manyacre, and he comes from Overstone."

The woman promised obedience; and no one but Joanna observed that, as Noel mentioned the name of his friend, Lady Mary started as if shot, and turned deathly pale. In a few moments she rose, and walking into one of the deep embrasures, pretended to be examining the landscape.

"Come into the garden, Maud," whispered Henry Dalzell, as Sir Ronald and Noel moved off with the Misses Elliott.

Joanna shook her head. "Please go out without me," she said, "I want to be left alone with Lady Mary for a few minutes; I fear something is wrong with her."

"Only a pain in her temper," ejaculated Dalzell, under his breath; "come away, and don't mind her."

Joanna raised her eyes to his face with the same calm expression of gentle firmness which he had seen on a former occasion.

"Lady Mary is my charge," she said, softly; "I could not feel it right to neglect her."

With an exclamation of impatience, Henry Dalzell left the room; and finding herself alone with Lady Mary, Joanna approached her, and asked, tenderly,—

"I fear you are not well, Lady Mary; can I get you anything? Would you like to go out into the open air?"

Lady Mary turned abruptly, and Joanna started to see her changed expression. Her eyes were like live coals, and expressed strong excitement; her lips were pale and compressed.

"Don't watch me," she said, almost fiercely; and then, exercising powerful self-control, she seized the girl's arm, and whispered eagerly, "Go, Joanna, go as far off as you can; leave me

here alone, I am not ill to-day, and I cannot explain what ails me. If you would serve me in life and death, leave me quietly here, and keep all from me. You can make the picture gallery an excuse—my love of pictures is no falsehood, and people are accustomed to excuses from me.”

“ But may I not stay with your ladyship ? ”

“ No, no ; on no account. Go and do as I bid you.”

Joanna passed out into the sunshine, but all the party had disappeared. She was glad of that, for the sight of Lady Mary’s excitement had startled and alarmed her, and she was glad to be able to think it over in quiet. Lady Mary was habitually querulous and fretful, and her countenance frequently disturbed ; but Joanna had never seen any exhibition of deep feeling, and she was sure to-day that her strongest passions were aroused. Yet she could not disobey her ; ignorant of the cause of her disquiet, she could not judge whether or no it was well to leave her thus alone. She had, therefore, no alternative but to obey.

In a few moments she saw Henry Dalzell

coming towards her. "I have just set the rector of Irskill and Mr. Jans at one another, towed them off in an opposite direction to that in which I wish to take you, and left them to fight it out. Come beside the lake; there is deep shade there, and a soft breeze, and I have got a poem of rare beauty to read to you."

"Hallo! Henry," cried a voice in the distance, which both the lieutenant and Joanna recognized as Sir Ronald Dalzell's. The son muttered words between his teeth, which his companion was sorry to have heard, and begged her to hasten to the rhododendron walk, that they might gain cover before the baronet should come in sight.

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Dalzell, I could not connive at your ignoring your father's call!"

"Miss Wallstein, if you knew what my father had been to me, you would know how utterly impossible respect could be on my part. But if you desire it, I will go to him."

He left her alone, and looked back before entering the shrubberies, just in time to see Noel Elliott join her. The word that he muttered be-

tween his teeth this time would have shocked her more than anything she had hitherto heard.

"It is an age since I have had a chat with you, Miss Wallstein," he said. "I have been so busy with guests, and so trammelled when not busy, that I have had time for no visits. I have heard from Margaret of your well-being."

"Oh, yes; I am quite well, and in this glorious weather life is very joyous!" Her face was glowing with light, and well bore out her assertion.

He looked at her with keen pleasure, and a new scene arose before his mind's eye. He saw his own fine old house illumined with a new glory—a sunny presence gliding among the old armour and the grand pictures, and shedding its radiance over common every-day events, till a roast joint and brown-bread loaf should become poetic, and the Muses descend uninvoked to inspire the whitewashers and charwomen. All this he saw as he gazed on the lovely woman at his side, but he only said aloud, "What an inestimable blessing your even and cheerful temperament is to you."

"It is, indeed," she replied, meeting his searching look with one full of frank cordiality. "My life of dependence is far happier to me than that which many a Court beauty leads !"

"I can well believe it, being very sure that the springs of happiness are within, not external to us. Jans and I find a fair amount of happiness together ; but we are rugged creatures, and should chafe each other sadly now and then, if my good aunts were not always at hand to appeal to. Jans becomes docile at once, however obstinate he may have been before, when Margaret brings her woman's tact into the argument."

"They are a great blessing to us all," replied Joanna. "At one time they and Mr. Jans were the only sunshine of my life."

"At one time. But you have more sunshine now. Whence comes it ?"

A deep blush suffused the girl's cheek, and her eyes remained down-cast. She answered in a lower tone than usual. "I fear I am getting more pleasure-loving ; mere air, and exercise, and

cheerful chat seem to make me happy now. And it may be that the light around me is not sunshine."

Noel was puzzled. At first sight of her blush his heart had given a bound, supposing the blush to be for him. But the faltering reluctant explanation was so enigmatical, that he could not flatter himself she was feeling anything for him. His next words were gloomy, and his voice sadder than her own.

"A cheerful temperament attains a kind of happiness as if by nature; but when thought asserts her power, and presses on our sight the sorrow around us, and the void within, our laughter ends in sighs."

This life of ours is a wild Æolian harp, with many
a joyous strain,
But under it all runs a sound of wail, as of souls in
pain!

She remained silent a few moments, and he watched her grave face clouded with sadness, but gradually the mist gave way, and lifting her eyes to his with enthusiasm, added to frankness,

in their expression, she continued his quotation,—

Faith alone can interpret life, and the heart that groans
and bleeds with the stigma
Of pain, alone bears the image of Christ, and can
understand its dark enigma.

His brow cleared also, but it was as if one yielded up a new hope, and resolutely determined to face difficulty with courage. His voice was gentle and earnest when he spoke again.

“Yes, truly, that is the reading of the puzzle. You have drunk deep of the cup of sorrow, and our heavenly Father is too tender to give you the draught to drain anew. Light, that is but a false glare to others, He will turn into true sunlight through you, and for your sake. I must leave you now, for I am host here, as well as at home, and my other guests have claims on my attention. God bless you, Miss Wallstein, always remember that I am your warm friend.”

He was gone, and never had Joanna felt so utterly bewildered. What did he mean? Why had he taken so serious a tone? His hearty words

of friendship were sweet and comforting, but what could he be alluding to in speaking of a "false glare" turned into sunshine for her? Surely he did not think that Lieutenant Dalzell—oh, surely, surely, she had said nothing to lead him to think that!

She had reached a secluded spot at the far end of the lake, and as the thought presented itself that her timid words had conveyed a wrong and perhaps presumptuous impression, she sank down on the bank and hid her face in her hands; she remained long thus, but was aroused suddenly by a voice close to her, which she at once recognized as Henry Dalzell's. "And have you really been so very good as to come to the trysting-place and wait for me until I had fulfilled the governor's behest? I call that virtue meeting far more than its due reward!"

Several emotions were struggling in Joanna's mind—shame at the suspicion of having expected him, terror lest he should divine from Elliott's manner that an impression had gone forth that he was paying her attention, the fear of untruthful-

ness should she leave him in possession of his present belief, and the dislike to giving pain, which withheld her for a moment from undeceiving him. But it was only for a moment, and then the absolute truth of her character triumphed, and she said,—

“I came here blindly, not knowing it for the place of which you had spoken; I did not expect to meet you here!”

“Coquette!” he ejaculated, mentally; but as she slowly and with effort raised her eyes, and encountered his, he amended his mental ejaculation with a juster sentiment,—“No; those truthful eyes could not act a part.” He saw that something had disturbed her—perhaps Jans had favoured her with a lecture during his absence; he would set her at ease by leading her off to subjects of general interest.

“Don’t you think that the arrangement of the walks and shrubberies here is very favourable to reminiscences of the past? Could you not fancy the old monks patrolling these paths, or meditating beside this lonely sheet of water? Evidently,

when asceticism prevailed, the ascetics had an eye to the beautiful as well as to the useful!"

"Yes," replied Joanna; "that was no doubt the case. But what an extraordinary fanaticism it must have been to lead them to hide like terror-stricken animals from the voice of their species."

"They did not exactly do that, you know: they were gregarious birds, and lived in communities."

"Yes; a collection of units, each in a sort of bivalve shell, opening to feed, and then resolutely shutting up again. Of what use could they be even to their fellows?"

"In some orders they achieved a good deal. But the fellows who peopled these walks would tell us volumes of their own utility."

"Yet their lines leave no footprints behind them; no names mark their resting-places!"

"Ah, Miss Wallstein! there you depict a soldier's fate just as truly as a monk's! We dare not hope for action in life, nor build on the expectation of our own ashes being gathered to our fathers. The firmament for a pall, and birds of prey for mourners, these are our dark apprehensions!"

“ You see, therefore, that the same contingency, or, at any rate, similar ones, happen to all. I know not whether most to dread war or superstition; military or religious despotism. Each follows a rule of arbitrary authority and unanswerable obedience, and individual conscience is in danger of falling into disuse under both régimes.”

“ Ah, you speak very truly ! ”

“ Have you seen service, Lieutenant Dalzell ? ”

“ Alas, no ; mine is a maiden sword. Misfortune has followed me through life, and haunts me still ! ”

“ I hope you have suffered no deeper grief than losing the chance of killing your fellow men ? ” she said, with an arch smile.

“ Ah, Miss Wallstein, how little you divine my feelings ! ” he exclaimed, reproachfully. “ I never knew a mother’s care, nor the sympathy and tenderness which, experienced by happier children, gilds their future life all through, even tingeing the heavy clouds of after-sorrow with their golden glow. I only know of this from books and from soul-hunger ! ”

“How different from my lot!” replied Joanna, in a voice of emotion. “My early life was all sunshine—all love and tenderness: my mother”——but she could not proceed; it was so rarely she could nerve herself to speak of that idolized mother!

A silence ensued, broken at last by Dalzell,—

“Miss Walstein, I pray you, endure once more to look at the contrast. You have seen my father! He has travelled all over the world, tested all pleasures, gained experience of every kind, yet he has seldom given me a hint on the most necessary things. I have to thank the diplomacy of modern manners for the bare fact of my continued life; love, kindness, even friendly interest, he has never shown me.”

“Stop, stop,” cried Joanna, “he is your father. Oh, be silent in his blame. Some day you will grieve over every undutiful word.”

Silence again ensued, Joanna moved forward, she pitied her companion from the depths of her heart, she liked him exceedingly, was constantly on the verge of loving him, but something came

continually to hold her back. She could not bear that his confidence should lack sympathy, yet she wished to avoid expressions of personal interest, lest he should feel that she was taking the initiative.

"Be comforted," she said, earnestly, "in the unfailing love of our heavenly Father. He will not leave you uncounselled or uncared for. Be patient, and joy will come in time. Do you know Owen Meredith's lines,—

To some men God hath given laughter, but tears to some men
 He hath given,
 He bade us sow in tears, hereafter to harvest holier smiles in
 heaven ;
 And tears and smiles they are His gift, both good to smite or to
 uplift."

"Beautiful !" exclaimed Dalzell. "Please repeat them again that I may write them down ; would that I could also imprison the exquisite music of the voice that speaks them !"

He tried to write against the bole of a tree, but the characters were scarcely decipherable.

"A book will do better," said Joanna, and gave him one, which she had kept concealed in a quaint

pocket fastened to her waistband. It was his own book of poems!

He did not speak as he took it from her hand, but he carried the book to his lips, which he pressed reverently upon it.

When he had written the lines, they proceeded along the margin of the lake, and, at the juncture of another path, they encountered Sir Ronald and Miss Elliott. Joanna turned to accompany them, and presently found herself walking side by side with Sir Ronald. Miss Elliott had turned back, and Margaret was chatting gaily with the lieutenant.

Sir Ronald had given his son a keen look as they met, which Henry bore without flinching. Margaret Elliott had gazed as searchingly at Joanna, and was less satisfied with her inspection.

"Who is Lady Mary Morton? Miss Wallstein—I mean—what are her antecedents? Of course, I know whose daughter she is. She was always reserved; now her manner forbids a query."

"If you know who her father was, you know

more than I do, Sir Ronald. Lady Mary so carefully conceals everything connected with her early life that I feel it only loyal to her to avoid learning anything of it. She is at all times reserved."

"And odd-tempered?"

"Pardon me, I am her dependant."

"I honour your feeling, Miss Wallstein. The Lady Mary evidently enjoys society?"

"Sometimes she does, but very often she cannot make up her mind to enter it."

"My son seems to have taken a great fancy to the neighbourhood, Miss Wallstein."

"He has found renewed health here. Variety pleases and benefits us all; the little excitement of his and your sojourn has made us quite gay."

"Ah, yes; such variety is mutually charming. The only drawback is that acquaintances thus formed are always short-lived."

She did not see the drift of his remark, and replied, gaily,—

"They often are so, but not necessarily."

"With soldiers necessarily, for they are here to-day and gone to-morrow; and the impressions

made upon them are more evanescent still. Doubtless, you have seen enough of the world to have noticed this peculiar characteristic of military life."

"No. I left the world just as I expected I was about to enter it. Mr. Dalzell is the first soldier I have met since my childhood."

"Then, Miss Wallstein, you would be wise to avail yourself of the experience of one who thoroughly knows the world. Avoid soldiers, let nothing induce you to marry a soldier. No officer ought to marry unless there is a very large fortune on one side—no officer who has seen life *intends* doing so."

Joanna saw what he meant now, and met his eyes with her grave courageous look, which said, plainly,—

"You shall not see me wince."

The bell rang lustily from the hall-gate, and Sir Ronald remarked, with a smile,—

"Major Manyacre's announcement; I suppose Elliott will answer the summons, and dinner will presently ensue. If you will excuse me, I think

it is due to the major that I should hasten to greet him."

Joanna was glad to be left alone, but she was not long destined to remain thus, for Mr. Jans and Henry Dalzell presently overtook her.

"I have been telling Mr. Jans that this pic-nic will, assuredly, figure in the *Overstone Mercury*, or *Courier*, or whatever they call the local journal."

"And I say it cannot be, for there is no local publication at Overstone."

"No publication whatever."

"Only the publication of the banns of marriage," he replied, stealing a sly look at the soldier, "and that is the most absurd and paradoxical of occurrences."

"Why so?" asked Dalzell.

"Did you ever look for the word 'ban' in Johnson's dictionary?"

"No, never."

"Then I'll tell you the meaning he attaches:—First, a notice of the union of N. and M. in matrimony; secondly, a curse; thirdly, an interdict.¹ The two first are so constantly amalga-

mated, that, if I had my will, I would merge both in the third, and pass marriage under interdict, except in rare cases."

Mr. Jans did not generally entertain such an opinion, and would have felt certain hopes terribly blighted had the law he proposed been enforced; but he was doing at the present moment what we are all more or less guilty of at times, making a general rule to remedy an individual error.

"Don't you see the order of arrangement?" he continued, sardonically. "The curse follows the notice, and the interdict the curse. The service itself begins with, 'Dearly beloved,' and ends with 'amazement!'"

Joanna had never heard her friend converse in this style before, and she was no longer perplexed as to the reason why he was considered bitter and sarcastic by many. Her own heart was heavy, and she could not come to the rescue of his bitterness, by her usual flow of cheerful chat. She was glad to see Mr. Elliott approaching, though the concern depicted in his face made

her remember, with sorrow and alarm, how ill she had left Lady Mary, and how long she had been absent from her. She hastened to meet Noel, to learn what he had come to tell.

“I have just ordered Lady Mary’s carriage, Miss Wallstein, and was seeking you. I fear her ladyship is very ill, I found her in a dead faint on the library floor; how long she has lain there I know not. I can see nothing of Major Manyacre, but Sir Ronald is seeking him.”

Joanna hastened forward, and soon reached the Priory. Lady Mary lay on a sofa, pallid, and with closed eyes. She bent over her, asking if she had pain.

“Pain—oh, yes! Take me home, Joanna—quick, quick—I shall die if they all come before I am gone!”

Noel assisted the suffering woman to her carriage, and Joanna placed herself beside her. She took one of Lady Mary’s cold hands, and it closed convulsively on hers, and held it so tight, that it was almost painful. With the other Lady Mary covered her eyes, and continued to do so till she reached her home.

And where was Major Manyacre?

He reached the Priory-gate, and found Elliott's groom waiting to take his horse, which he led at once to the stable. The major entered the house, and, passing through the great hall, where the cloth was already spread for dinner, he went into the library. A lady advanced to meet him, but the sight of her pallid cheek aroused a host of memories, which contracted his brow, and caused him to pale and shiver as with ague. He stood transfixed, while she struggled in vain to speak, for three moments, at last succeeding in giving utterance to one word—"Lovel!"

It was like a cry rather than a spoken word; her hands were stretched out appealingly—she seemed as if she dare not advance, and he, as if he would not.

The expression on his face was fearful, no wonder that it daunted her: his brows contracted, his eyes darting a glance like consuming fire, his lip curling with bitter contempt—together, he looked demoniacal. He turned to leave the room, but her bitter cry came again,—

"Oh, speak to me for one moment! hear me! hear me!"

"What can words avail between us?" he asked, through his clenched teeth. "Surely the world is wide enough to keep us apart. Have I not returned you all you had, and more?"

"Oh, yes, yes; it is not that. Hear my explanation; indeed you are deceived!"

"Deceived, ay, truly," he exclaimed; "deceived, once and for ever. Fool that I was! I have had more than enough of deception!" and he rushed from the room.

Lady Mary saw him depart, and then fell senseless to the ground, where Noel found her when he hastened in to welcome the major. He had heard a horse's feet in full gallop, and the sound had died away before he entered the house; he had, therefore, little expectation of finding the missing guest, although, as we have seen, he had allowed Sir Ronald to go in search of him.

CHAPTER X.

THE READING OF THE RIDDLE.

My husband hate me ! Give thyself the lie,
False and accurs'd ! Thy soul, if thou hast any,
Can witness, never lady stood so bound
To the unfeign'd affection of her lord,
As I do to my Sforza.—MASSINGER.

WHEN Lady Mary reached home she seemed to have lost all power of exertion. Joanna and Tambour supported her to her room, and the former wrote a note requesting the aid of Mr. Stanton, and despatched the page to the village therewith. Mr. Stanton obeyed the summons in all haste, and at once declared the lady to be suffering from nervous fever. He gave orders that she should be kept perfectly quiet, be carefully tended night and day, and he laid great stress on the regular administration of his medi-

cines. Joanna listened attentively to all, and directed all her powers to carry out his instructions.

For several days the fever was very high, often by day she was delirious, and invariably at night. Sometimes she would reproach Joanna for keeping her from her husband, then she would plead so pathetically for reconciliation, that her faithful nurse would fain have wept over her, and then again she would rave against some mysterious person, fancying he watched her from behind the curtain, and cry to Mr. Stanton, or Joanna, to save her from his cruel plots.

Mr. Stanton called Joanna to the dressing-room on the second evening of the lady's malady, and, carefully closing the door, gave her renewed charges:—

“Miss Wallstein,” he said, “you cannot have lived with Lady Mary for three years without becoming fully aware that her mind is burdened and her life embittered by some great sorrow. The little I have just heard of her delirious raving confirms an opinion I have long enter-

tained, that she is separated from a husband whom she still loves. Do you agree in my idea?"

Joanna hesitated for a moment, and then replied,—

"Mr. Stanton, I am sure you will acquit me of any wish to convey a reproof to you in saying that my ideas of honour forbid me talking over another's secret, which she is evidently anxious to conceal. On this account I do not wish to speak of my own impressions on the subject."

Mr. Stanton bit his lip, but answered kindly,—

"The very fastidiousness you feel in this matter will make the proposal I am going to put before you more reasonable in your eyes. I know I am asking a great thing on Lady Mary's behalf, but I also know of whom I am asking it. As long as her nerves continue so shaken, I wish you, and you alone, to remain by her side night and day. Her delirious ravings might awaken irrepressible curiosity in a maid, and any covert attempt to question her might irritate her shaken nerves to a dangerous degree."

Joanna waited, expecting him to say more, so he added,—

“Can you so far sacrifice self?”

“Is that all?” she replied, with a sunny smile.

Then becoming grave, and the earnest expression filling her eyes, she added,—

“I will do this as simple duty, having so long eaten her bread; I will do far more if needed. Lady Mary is alone in the world, I will act to her as a daughter.”

Mr. Stanton looked steadily in her face.

“But Lieutenant Dalzell will be back in barracks before your watch is over, and new belles have come to Overstone well calculated to win a soldier’s heart.”

Joanna blushed deeply, but she met the doctor’s eye firmly, and with steady purpose, and her voice was calm and sweet as she said, slowly,—

“I will give every thought to the duty God has brought before me. Do not fear that I shall fail.”

Nor did she fail. Day succeeded day, and found her at her post; night by night she con-

tented herself with snatches of sleep in an easy-chair; she got neither air nor exercise, and if her cheek became paler, and her figure lost its roundness, her step continued as light, and the music of her voice as cheerful, as ever.

Tambour was furious at first at her exclusion from the sick-room, but Miss Wallstein's gentle firmness overcame her obstinacy, and soothed her wounded pride, and as Lady Mary advanced towards convalescence all the jarring elements melted gradually into harmony.

Joanna thought she did not notice who was always beside her, but in this she was somewhat mistaken. Ten days after the commencement of her illness, she drew her tender nurse to her and asked,—

“Have I talked very strangely during my illness, my dear?”

“Sometimes the delirium has been very high, dear Lady Mary.”

“Then Tambour must have heard! I have had the impression that you were always with me, dear; but that, of course, was impossible. Oh, dear! oh, dear! Tambour will gossip.”

“Dear Lady Mary, Tambour has heard nothing. I only have been with you in your delirium. No one can gossip about you, for no curiosity is aroused.”

“Thank God !” ejaculated the invalid.

She remained quiet for some time, and then she whispered,—

“I shall never forget your devotion, Joanna; henceforth I will be your elder sister in all true love. Kiss me.”

Joanna kissed her tenderly, but checked her wish to talk.

“Lie still now, dear Lady Mary, and try to sleep; we shall have as much time, and more strength, to talk to-morrow.”

On the morrow, Lady Mary bade Joanna lay her head on the pillow beside her, and listen to her history. She remonstrated against this, fearing that Lady Mary imagined it due to her to give a confidence which it was yet painful to impart.

“My love, it will do me good. I never felt I could trust any one before, but for months past

you have been getting nearer and nearer my heart; your truth has won my respect—your devotion, my love:—

“I am the only and once spoiled daughter of a noble Scottish house. The late Lord Kinairdle was my father, my mother’s name was Morton. As Lady Gertrude Campbell I was sought and admired on every side, but of all my suitors the only one that I favoured was Lovel Manyacre, then only a lieutenant of dragoons. My name was Gertrude Mary Morton Campbell, my fortune was small for a peer’s daughter, but my father was ambitious, and still hoped to marry me to one of noble blood.

“Alas for his projects! At a ball at Glasgow I met Lieutenant Manyacre, and we were mutually attracted to one another. We danced together several times, and he followed up the impression he had made by daily visits at the house of the friend with whom I was staying. He had all the fiery ardour of a young soldier, and I was full of girlish romance, and we soon learned to love one another with passionate fervour. Again and

again during that winter I went into Glasgow, for balls and other gaieties, and he never failed to find me out, and renew his attentions. We were both painfully aware that my father would not consider Lovel a suitable match for his daughter, and we dreaded the moment when we must tell him of our engagement. The estate was encumbered, and I knew that he felt it would be necessary to marry me to wealth.

“ You will say that I ought to have endured the anger of my father, or any other trial, rather than continue to deceive him, and I know you are right in such an opinion ; but I was then no more loyal to God than to my father, and I allowed cowardice to blind me to my error, and went on meeting Lovel by stealth. At last, however, I yielded so far to the impatience of my lover as to sanction his calling to ask my father’s consent, though well aware that he would meet with a blunt refusal. I allowed this, and went further, for I deliberately determined, in case of my father’s expected refusal, to marry Lovel secretly, and thus rid myself of what I felt to be my father’s unreasonable tyranny.

“Alas, alas, I forgot all his claims upon me—his care during the years of my motherless childhood, his anxious plans for my education and settlement in life! I thought of nothing but self-pleasing, and the right to choose my own destiny. Filial duty and gratitude were dead, and my father was only regarded as a hindrance in my onward path!

“It fell out much as I had expected. My father’s first surprise at Lovel’s presumption kept him silent. But the storm was only delayed; in a very short time his rage broke forth ungovernably. He asked him sarcastically to favour him with a history of our acquaintance, and how he had gained a sufficient knowledge of my character to convince him that I was desirable as a wife. He then questioned him on his means and expectations, and laughed sardonically at the honour proposed, to live on a subaltern’s pay—to a lady who had been brought up amid every luxury!

“Poor Lovel was dismayed, but his sanguine disposition supported him, and he assured my father that he should rise, and attain to a better position in a wonderfully short time. My father

had a smile expressive of such withering contempt as I never saw on any other human face. He met Lovel's eager protestations and promises with this smile ; then assuring him that he appreciated deeply the honour intended for his daughter, begged him to relieve him of his presence, and the Lady Gertrude of his attentions, until the short time intervening between the present and his attainment to a field-officer's baton should have passed. Then, but not till then, he should have liberty to renew his offer.

"At this moment his face of fury is clearly before me, as I entered the room in answer to his summons. 'You have spent a gay winter, madam,' he hissed out, 'and begun betimes the game of breaking hearts !'

"Then, laying aside the bantering tone, and coming close to me, so that his fierce eyes looked into mine, he said, 'One thing is very clear ; you have forgotten who you are, and have buoyed up, with false and ruinous hopes, one infinitely beneath you—one so much your inferior as to be unworthy to take your name on his lips—one upon whose

pretensions I only care to spit! I have answered your lover; Subaltern Manyacre will venture no further question relative to the Lady Gertrude Campbell. I have forbidden his entertaining a thought of you till he shall have attained to the rank of a field officer. The simple favour you have now to show to your class, in return for the outrage you intended it, is to dismiss this upstart from your mind entirely.'

"I would have spoken, but he stopped me by a look; then, after a while, he said, 'Speak, if you choose.'

"Your anger frightens me, yet answer me one question. What has he done that you seem so outraged? He surely made no dishonourable proposal!'

"'Dishonourable, girl!' he exclaimed, drawing himself to his full height, and seeming to inflate with pride and fury. 'Go to your room. How dare you use the word dishonourable in my presence. Begone, fool! or I shall strike you where you stand.'

"At that moment, Miss Wallstein, a softening

word or look would have melted me. Rebellious though I was, I would gladly have yielded to tenderness then. Frightened, unnerved, utterly wretched, had he opened his arms to me, and offered forgiveness and shelter, I would have taken refuge in his bosom. But he had no relentings.

“I curtseyed low, and left him.

“Then came days of loneliness. He would scarcely endure me in his presence, and when with him he made me feel the full bitterness of his scorn and enduring anger. My wretchedness drove me outwards for sympathy, my pride resented the treatment I received; my father’s blood ran in my veins, and it led me to deepen my old determination.

“I laid my plans carefully, indeed, they seemed to form themselves naturally, only needing an adjusting hand. I wrote to Lovel, telling him that my father’s prohibition only enhanced his value in my eyes, and I should hold to my promise to him at all risks. I forbade his coming to the house—that would have been unsafe in the

highest degree—but I would contrive a meeting elsewhere before many weeks had passed.

“About this juncture a school-friend of mine, whom I had not seen for years, returned to her home in our vicinity, and sent me an invitation to a tête-à-tête dinner. The note came with my father’s letters; and as the unknown writing caught his eye, I saw him examine the envelope carefully; he then handed it to me, watching my countenance very narrowly. I read it, and then gave it to him for perusal. He seemed pleased, and remarked, ‘Very well, I shall be passing their house this evening, to fulfil an engagement of my own, and I can set you down, and call for you afterwards.’

“I thanked him, but said I felt little disposed for visiting, and I should prefer staying at home.

“‘Pshaw,’ he said, ‘what’s the use of moping! Go and see your friend, and open new interests.’

“‘As you desire it, then, I will go,’ I said, in a tone of indifference; ‘I will write an acceptance.’

“‘Do so,’ he replied; ‘I am going out at

once, and shall be absent all day, but I shall be at home in time to dress for our evening engagements.'

"When he was gone, I wrote both to my friend and to Lovel, telling the latter I would see him for half an hour at her house, if he would call early in the evening; and I sent my letter by a reliable messenger.

"As the hour approached my father did not return, but he sent the carriage, and with it a message to me, that he should be detained on business till next day.

"As I drove along I saw Lovel concealed so that he could see me without being seen. I called him to me, made him sit beside me, that I might tell him all that was passing, more fully than I had cared to write. I knew the old coachman would never betray me, and it was such joy to be with him! We arranged between us that I should spend the night at my friend's house, steal out in the morning to meet him, and that we should then be married. All our plans succeeded, and when my father called for me, my friend only

knew that I had gone out to walk, and would presently return, but I came not. Lovel and I were flying at the fullest speed of post-horses, having been married for two hours.

“We reached the coast, and embarked for the Continent, where we remained till Lovel’s leave expired, and then we joined his regiment. I endeavoured, on several occasions, to see my father, and obtain his forgiveness; and several mutual friends essayed to bring about a reconciliation, but in vain. I learned that he had married again, and that his bride shared fully in his bitter feeling against me. I never saw Kinairdle Castle more.

“My father died soon after the birth of his heir. He left me the small fortune which came through my mother, and a large accumulation of remorse and bitterness which will follow me to the grave. I believe my very existence was concealed from my young brother.

“For the first three years my husband and I lived happily together; our income, after my father’s death, though not large, was sufficient.

No cloud came across the even tenour of our life, until the time that Lovel brought home with him an old friend of his, by name Sir Robert Barton. Sir Robert was about forty years of age, very handsome and prepossessing, with a suavity of manner only gained in the best circles, and a deferential tone towards ladies, which is very attractive to us.

“From that time Sir Robert was a constant visitor in our house. We were then at Gibraltar, and our life was a very luxurious one. Never very strong, the heat of the climate further enervated me, and I was not equal to have the exercise and excitement which was almost a necessity to Lovel. He surrounded me with every comfort, took the greatest pains to find me a gentle horse to carry me for my short rides, and scarcely a day passed without his sending me in fresh flowers or perfume, or some Moorish toy, to please my fancy. All this gratified me, yet I longed for more of his presence, and complained fretfully how many hours of the day I was left alone.

“Lovel was kind and indulgent: he was sorry for my loneliness, but could not tame down his own active excitable temperament to sit at my apron strings; ‘Sir Robert is fond of chess, and plays nearly as well as you do, Gertrude,’ he would say: ‘he is coming to challenge you this afternoon.’

“It happened the same with our rides; my husband did not care for my ambling pace, while it suited Sir Robert admirably. Generous and confiding himself, Lovel trusted his friend most imprudently.

“Sir Robert was fond of reading; he brought me all the new books, and we discussed their merits together. At the State balls and dinners, he always tried to sit near me, and his intellectual conversation charmed me more than the exquisite wreaths of lilies of the Nile entwined round column and balustrade. I would have repeated to Lovel all that Sir Robert had said to me, but he got weary of our long discussions. He would tell me gaily of his race, or coursing, or his adventures at sea, and when I said, ‘Now, listen

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to what Sir Robert and I have been doing,' he would say, 'No, no, your histories are too tame; I cannot listen, or, I must fall asleep.'

"Matters went on thus for some time; when one unlucky day Sir Robert brought in a new volume of poetry, and sat as usual reading it to me. I sat in the window, the *jalousie* half-raised, and thus I seemed to monopolize the only light that found entrance into the room. He drew near to be able more easily to see the page, and seated himself on a stool at my feet. A short Italian poem was inserted among the others, and he asked my counsel in the translation; I stooped down to see the words, and, as I did so, he kissed me. It was the first time he had attempted anything of the kind, and I should at once have ordered him from my presence, but, as I raised my head to do so, I beheld a form at the other end of the room, dimly visible in the waning light. It was my husband!

"Mine is not a courageous nature, Joanna, and terror held me dumb, as I saw the look of fury with which he regarded his former friend. He

had been riding, and his whip was in his hand; he approached steadily, and deliberately struck Sir Robert once and again across the face with it. Sir Robert recoiled, I heard him mutter between his teeth, 'You shall answer for this,' and I knew no more. I had sunk on the floor in a dead faint.

"When consciousness returned, I found myself surrounded by strangers. I asked where I was, and was told I was in the house of a lawyer, that my passage was taken by the next vessel to England, and that I should presently hear of my husband.

"I was terribly enfeebled by the shock, and as I lay there I had only power to suffer and endure. Again and again I sent messages imploring that my husband would see me, for then I could explain all; but my entreaties produced no effect.

"In a day or two the lawyer came to me, and informed me that Captain Manyacre had executed a deed, releasing all my property, and placing it at my whole and sole disposal. That he refused

ever to see me again, but would endeavour in process of time to forgive me. Of course Sir Robert had challenged him, and the duel would assuredly take place.

“When I look back at that time my only wonder is that I did not go mad. I wrote long and passionate appeals to my husband, assuring him of my innocence and my unalterable affection. These the lawyer took, but I do not believe that one of them reached him. Then I heard that the duel had taken place, Sir Robert was wounded, some said dangerously, and Captain Manyacre had fled. Weaker, more helpless, more nerveless than ever, I let them carry me on board the ship, and came back to England.

“I determined to live in seclusion, ever hoping and praying for a time of explanation to come. I dropped both the family name and Christian name by which I had been known, and went only by my two Christian names, Mary Morton. Mr. Stanton and Sir Ronald have both suspected my identity, but both have been too well-bred to proclaim a fact I evidently wished to conceal.

I have since learned that Sir Robert recovered from his wound, but died of fever at a later date.

“When I accidentally heard my husband’s name at Boulston, I felt the moment of my desire drew near. I sent you away that I might meet him alone, and hoped, oh, how much, from the rencontre. My despair at his rejection was proportionate to the brightness of my hope!

“And now, darling, you know the cause that has rendered my life bitter; your sweet forbearance first led me to question the reasons of my irritability—I see it as a consequence of broken ties and blighted hopes, but I see also that it is not a necessary consequence. You will teach me to endure sorrow sweetly, to look more to heavenly hopes as earthly ones grow dimmer and dimmer, and to love all I may, if I cannot show my love to all I would. Will my young sister engage to help me thus?”

Joanna clasped the sufferer in her arms, and fervently promised her unfailing love, and all the poor aid in her power.

Lady Mary wept, but as her arms encircled the

girl's slender neck, she no longer felt alone or hopeless. A new light shone in her eyes, a new aim gilded her hopes, and when, exhausted with her long recital, she sank to sleep, she lay breathing placidly as a child.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

He knows

When the Queen frowned, or smiled ; and he knows what

A subtle statesman may gather of that ;

He knows who loves whom, and who by poison

Hastes to an office's reversion.—DONNE.

ALL this time we have left the remainder of the pic-nic party discussing their dinner at Boulston Priory in peace. The departure of the two ladies, and the loss of the gallant officer, did not affect the spirits of the remaining members of the group—with the exception, perhaps, of Noel Elliott, who was looking anxious and perplexed. But, not unmindful of his guests, notwithstanding the causes of distraction which occupied his mind, he proposed a four-miles' walk to Sir Ronald, who gladly acceded to his wish, as a beautiful view

was to be the reward of their exertions. Henry Dalzell excused himself from accompanying them on the plea of being already tired, and threw himself on a couch to rest; Bertha and Margaret sauntered out with Jans; and Dr. Vansettle, seeing at a glance that there was wine remaining in two of the bottles, tucked his legs under the mahogany again to finish up the heel-taps. Dalzell tried to sleep, but could not, and it then occurred to him that he might forward his project by gaining hints from the parson, so to this intent he began a cross-examination.

“Is Lady Mary wont to electrify her friends by these sudden disappearances?”

“No, it is a new dodge, and I suspect there is something at the back of it.”

“What, has she designs? and on whom? My old dad? By Jove, it would be a great design that should attain to his elevation!”

“No, no, you have lost scent.”

“What! is it that blundering squire, who let me walk over his preserves, and carry off his game, with only a latent sigh lest I should pluck his pheasant before killing it?”

The doctor winked, and then laughed till Dalzell feared a fit of apoplexy, and calculated on which arm he should bleed him, and whether the sharp-pointed old carving-knife or a fork would do the business most effectually; but the old fellow recovered, endangered his life again by a fit of coughing, and then croaked out fresh defiance.

“You are a bad hit; you should not be allowed to carry fire-arms. You’ll shoot yourself, and be a dead coon before the bird rises.”

Dalzell looked steadily in the bloated face of the unworthy rector, and saw in the twinkle of his reddened eyes, he had met his equal in the game. He felt uneasy, for he loved refined and gentleman-like wickedness; and the vice that looked out of Vansettle’s eyes was as much coarser than his own pet mixture, as was the bloated person and unwholesome complexion of the doctor to his own fine features and slim figure: so he exclaimed, in pettish irritation,—“I wish you would express your meaning in plain words.”

Vansettle also looked vexed, but he had taken

wine enough to make him obstinate in an argument.

“Well, then, take it in plain words, if you like such change. You have fallen in love with Joanna Wallstein, but you hope to take your fine person and expected title to a more monied market! Nevertheless, seeing that the tree is lined, I prophesy that the bird will be snared while planning to steal the fruit.”

“Confound your prophecies, sir, or keep them for your sermons—I doubt not they will be as edifying to your hearers as anything else you are likely to say to them. The bird you allude to is older than his years, and most certain to avoid the snare of matrimony. You will not catch me staking my knight against a pawn.” He rose as he spoke, and left the room.

Dr. Vansettle sat chuckling till he endangered another choking fit.

“Lovely!” he exclaimed, “sweet, heavenly—what a cherubim! A pawn! She, whose shoe he is not worthy to black! Haw, haw! to see how he walked into my snare!”

Presently he, too, sauntered out, and took a path among the shrubberies. He continued to mutter to himself: "He has shown his hand: I shall win by honours," and the like. He heard steps and voices in a path that ran parallel to the one he was traversing, and scuffled behind the stout bole of a yew-tree, in the hope that Fortune would send him a treat in the eavesdropping line. He was not disappointed.

Jans and Margaret passed slowly along the path.

"I can't help feeling uneasy about dear Joanna," she said. "I cannot doubt that Mr. Dalzell has serious intentions towards her; what I fear is, that his is not a disposition to make her happy, and the very narrow income that his must be, will be insufficient to provide comforts enough to content him."

"I participate in your fears," he replied; "how seldom is it, indeed, that we do not share the same opinion."

The listener did not see the smile that accompanied these words, and which illumined the rugged face of the philosopher with an interest

almost amounting to beauty ; but his imagination filled it in emphasizing the inuendo with winks and shrugs which did not clothe the parson's face with rays of beauty or interest.

"But," continued Jans, "I have less fear than you have. Joanna could not fail to brighten the humblest lot. They will be poor enough, but time will remedy that ; the baronet will go off the stage in due time, and I have a strong impression that Lady Mary will leave her property to my adopted daughter, and then she will have as much fortune as is desirable for a woman."

"Ah, but, Mr. Jans, my instincts warn me that Mr. Dalzell is not the man to make a good husband. You know women's arguments are proverbially illogical ; we *feel* out what men *reason* out. I can give no grounds for my impression, yet I feel convinced that Lieutenant Dalzell is thoroughly unprincipled. I shrink involuntarily from him ; though, of course, I am aware that my age precludes all possibility of his troubling me with his attentions !"

Mr. Jans smiled.

“Is yours a very advanced age? You are a wonderful woman for your years!”

He looked into the fair comely face, now beaming with frank humour, as if the view was one very pleasant to his eye.

“I am thirty-five,” she replied; “and women become old maids at thirty.”

The doctor bent forwards till he nearly lost his equilibrium, which would have been a serious loss to one whose figure was not calculated for athletic exercises; but it was too provoking that Mr. Jans’ rejoinder was in a low tone, and that he and his companion had receded too far for Dr. Vansettle’s ear to catch any more of their words. It only, therefore, remained to him to make the best use of what he had heard; and this he began to arrange, congratulating himself in winks and chuckles that Jans also had shown his hand, in which Joanna did *not* figure as a queen of hearts.

The pic-nic had come to an end. The doctor plodded along the road, having left his gig at the house of a friend a mile distant, to avoid coming

through the toll-gate. Elliott's carriage passed him, and he nodded to Noel and the elder Dalzell, only greeting the other with a sly look, which insured him a sulky fit for the remainder of the drive. The Miss Elliotts also passed in their pony-carriage, and shortly afterwards he was overtaken by Jans. The philosopher would have passed him with a civil "good evening," but the doctor willed it otherwise.

"I am so glad you have overtaken me, Mr. Jans. I am most anxious to have a little conversation with you about your interesting and lovely —ward shall I call her?"

"Call her my ward, if you like, sir; that is, supposing you mean Miss Wallstein."

"Yes, Miss Wallstein, the fair Joanna! Ah, who that had looked upon her beauty, as it shone forth glorified to-day, could think or speak of any other!"

"I don't know what you mean, Dr. Vansettle. If you wish to speak of Miss Wallstein, I would rather that you put off the conference to another day when you have not taken wine."

“Till next Good Friday! No, sir, no; that is too distant a period. The angelic creature may be in her grave before then, and will be most likely if no friendly hand withholds her from the gulf yawning at her feet!”

Jans was out of patience. These remarks he recognized as favourite passages from the most flowery and objectionable of the rector's discourses, so he replied curtly,—

“If you have anything to say, for heaven's sake say it in plain words, and only afflict me with metaphors on Sundays.”

“If you cherish the happiness of the fair Joanna, beware of Henry Dalzell.”

“I don't see what harm is likely to accrue to Miss Wallstein from the sojourn in this neighbourhood of Lieutenant Dalzell.”

“That's not true, Mr. Jans. I'll ask Miss Margaret Elliott whether you see danger or not, or whether she sees any. I act the part of a faithful shepherd and tender pastor to that snowy lamb, by warning her guardian that Henry Dalzell is a wolf—a greedy, voracious wolf—who

will tear her fleece for his amusement, and when her heart is broken, will assure her he meant nothing but platonic friendship."

"Dr. Vansettle, unless you repeat to me word for word whatever Mr. Dalzell may have said on this subject to you, I will tell him of the accusations you have brought, and leave him to deal with you as he thinks proper."

The parson looked frightened.

"Have patience only, and I will tell you what he said. These are his words, which he used in answer to some remarks of mine about his evident attentions to the fair Joanna:—'The bird (that was himself) is older than his years, and most certain to avoid the snare of matrimony. You will not catch me staking my knight against a pawn.'"

"The foul fiend fly away with the blackguard," exclaimed Jans, whilst every feature expressed furious indignation. "And that true-hearted Elliott, that essential English gentleman, has been harbouring such a vampire! Were the house mine, I would this night shovel out the

vermin. You have done well to tell me this: the timely revelation of one such hideous plot is enough to atone for the mischief-making of a long life. Miss Wallstein shall know that you have stood her friend."

Jans hurried forward, and the doctor ambled on gently.

"I have trumped that hand," he soliloquized: my play is beautiful—so thoroughly scientific; and it is a noble game." His expression grew fretful as he continued, "What an insolent beggar that hanger-on of Elliott's is!—talking of 'afflicting him with my metaphors on a Sunday,' and a 'long life of mischief-making.' I would fain punish him, but I don't see how. Miss Margaret's clear eyes look me through when I try any petty ruses on her, so I can't spoke his wheel on that side. Well, perhaps a chance of paying his debt may occur in the next game!"

As Jans strode along the dusty road, his indignation began sensibly to diminish, it might be by evaporation, or that he stamped it to powder. If you had seen his heavy tread, you would have

inclined to the latter opinion, as we, who have the best means of judging, do. But the process of diminution signifies little, and in no degree interferes with the fact, seeing that as Mr. Jans reached the stile leading to the field-path from Irskill to Elliott's Cray, he came to a dead halt, and said in a clear, calm voice,—

“ I am a fool ! ”

Leaning on the stile, and watching, with apparent interest, the composed manner in which the cows, lying here and there in the pasture, were chewing the cud, he again spoke, and this time in a tone as if further reflection had confirmed and deepened his original impression :—

“ I am a great fool ! a very great fool ! I could not have thought it of myself ! To be led away by that man—that blot upon the name of clergyman—that essential dirt, according to Lord Palmerston's definition of “ anything out of its place ” —that most sneaking of gossips, most shameless of mischief-makers, most abominable of drunkards, most calculating of gamblers ! Truly, I owe Dalzell an apology for having believed that man's

word against him, and now the only *amende* that I can make is to cast the suspicion from me as entirely as if I had never heard it. I will not even tell Noel; I will not soil my lips by repeating his slander. I will prosecute myself for defamation if I find myself cherishing the memory of his words in my secret heart. It shall be with me as if he had not spoken them."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF A LIFE.

There shall be time for deeds, and soon enough,
Let that come when it may. And it may be
Deeds must be done shall shut and shrivel up
All quiet thoughts, and quite preclude repose
To the end of time.—OWEN MEREDITH.

Just after Noel Elliott reached home, he was surprised by the sight of an orderly, riding at full speed up the approach. This startled him rather, and he went to meet him. The man presented a note, telling Mr. Elliott that the major had bid him return at once, and with a military salute he reined round, and galloped off at the same speed with which he had approached.

The note conveyed Major Manyacre's excuses. He was called to London on pressing business. He must attend at the Horse Guards early in the

morning. He believed he was to be appointed to foreign service.

Returning to the house, Noel found that the tea was placed on the table, and presently the other members of the household assembled to partake of the refreshing beverage.

"You look done up, Dalzell; your strength is only half-recruited at best," he said, as he noticed the lieutenant's languid air.

"My nerves have just sustained a shock," he replied; "I have seen a ghost."

"Indeed! When, where, and how?"

"Ten minutes ago. In the approach close to the lodge gate. I saw it by means of my eyes."

"What kind of a ghost? It is hardly dark enough to see apparitions; you should have waited another half-hour first."

"Certainly it was a ghost suited to my profession and habit of mind. It was an orderly; of course bringing me a command from her Majesty to resign my lieutenant's commission, and become commander of the forces. But even as I gazed, the fair apparition melted away, and when I had

watched for ten minutes the next turn in the avenue, and he emerged not, I knew to what class of beings to ascribe both horse and rider. The one to the genus *homo*, order *miles*; the other to the genus *equus*, I assure you. The orderly came to me with a note from Major Manyacre, and I met him in the avenue, just beyond the turn upon which you fixed your anxious scrutiny."

"So ends my fair vision, my beautiful and spiritual imagination. And what excuse does my revered superior make for his eccentric disappearance?"

"No direct excuse. He is summoned to London, and believes his destination to be foreign service."

"Whew! What is in the wind now? I wonder if he is telling the truth; it does not look very like it! How could a telegram reach him at Boulston Priory? for we heard of no orderly riding thither on a foaming steed, and disappearing like a flash of lightning! Manyacre is not a good deceiver, he is essentially matter of fact, just a blunt, hearty, straightforward soldier."

"There is doubtless more meaning in his conduct than meets the eye," rejoined Sir Ronald. "No one can help associating his abrupt departure with Lady Mary's illness, even were they not possessed, as I am, with the key to the enigma."

"Are you in the confidence of any of the parties concerned? or are we at liberty to question you upon our local mystery?" asked Noel.

"Well, I fear I ought to guard it as a confidence," replied Sir Ronald. "It is a great pity that the Lady Mary should so resolutely insist on keeping the secret, for the matter looks far worse than it is. Hiding as she does, she lays herself open to the suspicion of being concerned in some dark intrigue."

"No one who knows Major Manyacre well would believe him to be engaged in anything nefarious," exclaimed Henry Dalzell, warmly. "He is much beloved in his regiment. We all revere him as an officer, and value him as a friend. There is a melancholy about him, which, on first acquaintance, gives one an impression that

he is unsympathetic; he avoids society, especially that of ladies; in fact, we all regard him as a woman-hater. But we can excuse that; the fair sex have plenty of admirers among us, though not so many as we have among them. We have always felt that there was a mystery about the major: that he had a ghost of some kind in his house, and we suspected a woman to be at the bottom of it. We never really ascertained anything, but our suspicions generally reverted to a faithless wife; and I feel pretty sure we have found her in Lady Mary."

"Suspend judgment, Dalzell," pleaded Noel; "do not let such an injurious thought attach to Lady Mary, unless backed with full proof. If Major Manyacre is what I take him for, he would be the last to throw an aspersion on her character."

"That I am sure he would," replied Dalzell. "He is not easily angered, but when once roused he cannot be induced to hear reason. Some slight cause may have created a difference, which he would not have patience to hear explained. I am

sorry he has flown off in this eccentric orbit, for we are sure to lose him from Overstone, and Welsh will make a poor coachman in his place."

The party separated for the night, but rather to join in smaller cliques than to seek their rest. Noel and Jans sat together in the smoking-room; Sir Ronald and his son conversed in the bed-room of the former.

"What a wretched brute that Vansettle becomes, Noel!" exclaimed Jans. "It is of no use planning improvements, and studying philanthropic plans for the poor people of the estate, while that hireling, that drunken, drivelling, mischief-making gourmand subverts all good by his pestilential character!"

"Jans, you are actually abusive! You have accustomed me to hear you snarl and growl, but such barking and howling is a new and alarming symptom. If you are not suffering from hydrophobia, I shall feel it my duty as a magistrate to commit you for intemperate language. What has put you so frightfully out of temper?"

"I am angry with the parson."

"That is seen of itself, as the Germans say. But what has he done?"

"Oh, never mind. It is not worth repeating his enormities."

"Not if you mean to go to bed to-night."

"Dalzell irritates me too. What does he mean by saying that soldiers have more admirers among the women than the women have among them. As far as I can see of the ways of soldiers, they never let the women alone."

"Not often, certainly. But it is no less true that the women make great fools of themselves about them. It is proved by naturalists that there is some nerve in a bull's eye which is naturally irritated by the sight of scarlet. I suspect there is an analogous nerve in a woman's."

"They are an awful nuisance, these soldiers; you see they cannot afford to marry early, so they are free to indulge in a series of flirtations lasting for many years. Then the middle-aged ones get to be somebodies, and they look for considerable means, and considerable alliances."

"The same is true of other men, Jans, though

not always from the same cause. You and I know two men of another class, one a philosopher, and the other a country squire, and they have not married young, and have, therefore, been free to indulge in an equal series of flirtations. The principal difference exists in the eye of the ladies; the scarlet nerve not becoming inflamed by our plain coats, we are not tempted by them to flirt; and as in middle age we do not become somebodies, we neither look out for means nor alliances."

"True, true, Noel. The army is a wonderful school for distinctions. Now and then the right men get into it, men who are soldiers at heart, such as Dalzell describes this Manyacre to be. But generally it is the refuge for the younger sons of noblemen or other luxurious young men who have no principle but self-indulgence, no loyalty except to Mrs. Grundy. Idle fellows expelled from Eton, and plucked at Oxford, hating and disdaining manual labour, and with only intellect enough to avoid running their heads against a wall! Void of self-control, void of

honesty of purpose, unable to conceive a pure aim, achieving every step by interest and corruption. Look at half the officers, gentlemen born, and roués bred; how much silent and unobtrusive merit must be shoved aside to make way for their advancement?

“Look again at true merit. The sergeant-major works his way up from the ranks, gains every step by faithful service and high character. He attains to a subordinate command, and his good-service stripes depend not only upon his own good conduct, but upon that of every man under his charge.

“What are his chances of promotion? None. The new man who purchases over his head may be a ridiculous martinet, proud, conceited, and ignorant. In no other branch of human life do we follow this absurd course. Science, art, and commerce rise from just rudimental foundations, and their administrators rise in due progression. Everywhere but in the army things are done decently and in order!”

Noel threw himself back in a fit of laughter.

“What a mercy I brought you in here; you would have had a fit of epilepsy before morning, if you had gone to bed with all this spleen on your mind. Take some of my prime tobacco, and smoke ‘the calumet of peace.’ The army will do very well. If our officers are effeminate self-indulgent fops in peace, the true blood of the English gentleman proves its worth in war. Let them alone.”

“Never, Noel, as long as promotion can be bought or begged. It is so unnatural, so unconstitutional; I would have promotion entirely by merit, and that to be such a matter of course that it should prejudice any person for any attempt to be made on his behalf to gain anything by interest.”

“Hear, hear! Now I hope the sermon is over. It’s no use lashing yourself into a fury, old fellow; you and I can effect no alteration by mere argument.”

“But it will be altered. So let the house be set in order soon.”

“Jans, you are becoming dangerous. Soon

you will be revolutionary. I fear for the safety of my house; yours is the true spirit of an incendiary. Consider yourself under arrest, and go to bed! I shall come myself to put out your candle."

"Henry," said Sir Ronald Dalzell, as he threw himself into an easy chair, in his son's room, "I am leaving to-morrow, and you and I may never meet again, so I would fain say a thing or two to you. You accuse me justly, when you say I have shown you little parental care; often of late have I blamed myself that such has been the case. But really, at the time you left me, I hardly knew how to take care of myself. I was in no nursing mood, and the care of you necessarily devolved on others. Let that pass. Now that I am the worse for wear, I would gladly pay you the debt I owe you, as far as it is possible. Feel here, Harry," he continued, placing his son's fingers on his head. "That ridge which you feel, is the scar of my first wound. It might have prevented many another scar which has come since then, if I would have learned caution from

experience; and I would that you should be warned by my life-scars. That wound I received at a billiard-table, where I had played all night, and drank till I lost self-command. I insulted my antagonist, calling him a thief and a swindler, and he struck me down. Yet this did not wean me from play. I had wealth and position, and thought I could afford to be a black-leg. I played on and on, and lost more and more, and thus I ruined myself, spending all I could spend, and obliged to mortgage my estates heavily."

"And you offer me the experience you bought with my patrimony. I admire the suitability of the return!"

The baronet winced, but continued his narrative.

"In my twenty-sixth year, I made a long sojourn in Paris. I mixed freely in every-kind of society, from the Savonnaire to the Tuileries. I saw all that was high bred, and all that was infamous in that city of pleasure. Among other entertainments, I amused myself by making love to a girl of respectable family, whom I knew to

be already engaged. It diverted me to see the jealousy of the old lover. He became infuriated, and called me out; I granted his request, we fought, and he fell. For a long time he lingered, and I endured the horror of the fact that a turn in his state might at any moment make me a murderer. I heard afterwards that she had watched over him in his danger, and that she and all her family had cursed me for an ungenerous guest, who had insinuated myself under their roof only to prey upon their happiness. The horror of that time drove them to travel, and I sought in the prairies of America that peace of which my own conduct had robbed me in Europe. I joined some fellows like myself, and we prided ourselves in becoming half Indians."

He paused a few moments, then added in an under-tone, "I cannot tell you circumstantially the history of an Indian maiden, who was sacrificed by her countrymen, to save her from a humiliation which they reckoned worse than slavery. But I can see the eyes of that girl, Harry, as at night I sit alone and watch the fire, and remem-

ber the fondness with which she answered my cold and unmeaning professions!

"You cannot suppose the motive a light one which induces me to recount to you these harrowing scenes. I have been intemperate and prodigal; I have been a sensualist and a gamester; and the only amelioration to my villany which memory recalls, are the few occasions when I have been a gentleman.

"I have measured all your strength, Henry, in the trifling game you have just now in hand; and pooh-pooh the matter as you may, I am sure you mean mischief. Be warned in time, your plots will recoil upon yourself. You do not like my counsel, and my narrative has wearied you. The sympathy and regard that you show me are just what I deserve. Good night!"

Noel Elliott heard Sir Ronald lock his door, just as he was stealing out into the corridor on his way to put out Jans' candle. He performed his mission, and was disappointed in his intention of giving Jans a prepared lecture on grumbling, by finding the philosopher sound asleep. So

silence rested on Elliott's Cray, and even Lady Mary Manyacre was blessed with some rest, while her outraged but mistaken husband leaned his throbbing head against the cushioned elbow of a railway carriage in the night express, and wondered why for him alone there was no home on God's earth.

CHAPTER XIII.

RUTH AND BOAZ.

My masters, may
A jester by confession,
Scarce noticed join, half sad, half gay,
The close of your procession ?
The motley here seems out of place
With graver robes to mingle ;
But if one tear bedews his face,
Forgive the bells that jingle.


FREDERICK LOCKER.

ALL the friends of Lady Mary Morton had been very attentive in their inquiries after her health ; but the generality had only received messages of thanks, and simple bulletins through Tambour ; only to the Misses Elliott, or to Jans, had Joanna stolen away for five minutes, to give verbal information, and this during the convalescent stage of the malady.

But among all the circle of the lady's friends none had shown more solicitude than Lieutenant Dalzell and the rector of Irskill, and both of these gentlemen had asked repeatedly whether Miss Wallstein would not calm their anxiety for the invalid, by granting them a personal interview.

It so happened that, as the autumn advanced, and Lady Mary was beginning to contemplate sending out her cards of acknowledgment preparatory to returning again to society, Joanna was taking a stroll round the garden, just as Henry Dalzell entered the gate. She felt confused for a moment, half accusing herself of having planned such a rencontre, but the next moment she felt strong in her sense of rectitude, and met him with frank cordiality.

He detained the little hand she extended to greet him, and looking earnestly in her face, said, "Dear Miss Wallstein, how pale and thin you have grown! You should not thus sacrifice yourself to the caprice of a selfish hypochondriac; really you ought to have some care of yourself for the sake of us all—of all who love you."



She was pale no longer, but she said eagerly as she gently disengaged her hand,—“Indeed Lady Mary needed all my care, and is well worthy of it. I have not given my strength as a sacrifice to duty, but as the loyal service of true friendship.”

“You puzzle me, Miss Wallstein. Your own character is so high; you are so infinitely above self-seeking or self-interest, yet you seem to love and admire a selfish character as much as if it were ever so noble.”

“Oh, no, there you are mistaken; I love and admire a character *called* selfish, because I know the term to be a libel, and having been admitted behind the scenes, can read the true nobility which underlies the scum of fretfulness.”

“What a warm advocate you are; would that I could ever be judged by such a counsel!”

“I fear I must not ask you in,” she said, as in their sauntering stroll they reached the hall door. “Lady Mary has not quite got over her nervousness at seeing visitors, though she promises me to do so within a few days.”

Dalzell looked all submission. "May I come again in a few days and hope for admission?" he asked.

"Certainly, you may. But I suppose you have returned to Overstone; it is a long ride from thence!"

"Not when I have the hope of seeing you at the end!" he exclaimed, with an impassioned look. "Yes," he added, "I left Elliott's Cray within a few days of the pic-nic at Boulstone. My father took a fit of the blues that very night, and favoured me with a free and full confession of the sins of his life. The history was not an engaging one; anything but suitable for a lady's album; I should have felt more indebted to him had he chosen another confidant."

"Oh, Mr. Dalzell, you pain me by speaking thus of your father. To whom could he so naturally and wisely impart the results of his experience as to his only son! Whose sympathy has he so much right to claim?"

"There you go! Warm in defence of my old father, who bore you no good will, but rather

regarded you in a sinister light. But it is all one to Miss Wallstein, whether people are her friends or her foes, she is such a true knight-errant, that she takes up arms for all who are attacked, justly or unjustly."

"Then both you and Sir Ronald left Elliott's Cray some time since?" said Joanna, pained by the insinuation regarding the disfavour of Sir Ronald, yet wishing to hide that she was so.

"He left next day in a sweet state of mind, and I took my departure in two more days. . . . Hark! I hear Dr. Vansettle's 'haw, haw,' in the road; I will be humane and let you go in, and so save yourself from an interview with him."

Dalzell was half inclined to aggravate the tiresome old doctor, by boasting of his interview with Joanna as he met him at the gate, but he checked himself, in the fear that it might make the old man so importunate that she would be compelled to see him also.

"Dear me!" he soliloquized, "how considerate I am growing. That girl will make an angel of

me, if I hover about her long enough. Really, my motive in visiting her is of the very best—I come for improvement. I ought to write and tell my old dad so, that he might lay the flattering unction to his soul of having converted me!”

The Sunday following this visit of Dalzell’s was bright and beautiful, and Lady Mary determined to take her usual place in church once more.

On the Saturday, the rector had entertained a select card party, composed of gentlemen from Overstone, who did not belong to the “set” whose doings are recorded in our story. As he hurried home in the afternoon, to get all in readiness for his chosen friends, the old clerk accosted him.

“That board in the pulpit is looser than ever, and the next is as rickety as need be, sir.”

“Then get a nail or two, and fix them firmly.”

“It ain’t o’ no use, sir. I’ve nailed them boards till they won’t nail no longer. T’ boards, and that they are nailed to, is all rotten together. You should have a new floor.”

“Oh, yes; very likely. You’d run me up a bill of four or five pounds in no time, just to play

into the hands of your nephew, the carpenter. Nail the boards, I say, or I'll find a clerk that will."

The clerk went his way grumbling, and the rector thought no more about his church dilapidations.

Dr. Vansettle had expected Lady Mary and her interesting companion to make their appearance at church for the two last Sundays. He had prepared an elaborate discourse on Ruth and Naomi, embracing a psalm of gratitude for the rich harvest and a full-length portrait of Joanna and Lady Mary as the Scripture characters above mentioned, and winding up with an exordium so flowery and ecstatic as must infallibly carry captive the minds of the audience. This was only one link in a chain of preconcerted diplomacy, which was ultimately to result in a grand triumph to the doctor. After church, he was to congratulate Lady Mary on her recovered health, and appoint a meeting with Joanna in some wood, not approached by a hilly path, but attainable by flat ground, which suited the increas-

ing corpulence and decreasing strength of the diplomatic rector. And then, and then—but we must wait for the rest, or where is the use of the patience which we have been so laboriously cultivating for years. The bells of Irskill church have rung out their last and merriest peal, and the single bell is now crying, “Come, come, come,” to such of the congregation as have not yet taken their places. The rector has puffed and panted into the reading-desk, and Lady Mary, supported by Joanna, enters by the chancel door, passes the stout fir bole, which the rector has introduced as a column *au naturel* to support the chancel roof, and takes her place in her pew. The clerk gives out the hymn, and the grind-organ plays it in jerks and snatches, no one attempting to sing to the discord. Do not blame the congregation for this; Jans, Noel, and Joanna had tried perseveringly to sing, but the grind-organ was like an unbroken horse—it stopped unexpectedly, leaving the voices unaccompanied, then bounded on, to make up for lost time, or slackened speed if the rector was in danger of being hurried in finding his places.

But the eccentricities of the musical department had long since ceased to raise a smile on the countenances of the congregation.

To-day, as on the last two Sundays, the rector had come provided with two sermons, and the one dedicated to Joanna had been suppressed so far. But to-day it came forth in all its glory, the preacher inflating and sinking his voice, in no bad imitation of his colleague, the grind-organ. Jans and Noel were in convulsions over the description of Ruth and Naomi; Joanna recognized Lady Mary, and covered her eyes with her hand, lest she should see a smile on any other face, and her own risibility should be excited thereby. On that hand thus prominently exhibited was a diamond ring, which Lady Mary had recently given her.

The preacher continued : " Behold the chaste and lovely Rúth, her raven locks mingling with the white feathers in her hat, her lovely arm encircled by bracelets of the hair of her lost loved one, the evening sun gilds her graceful form, and reflects itself in the costly ring on her slender finger."

Joanna was too horrified to be amused; she felt

she was being held up to the ridicule of the congregation ; she changed the hand before her face for the one on which the glove remained, and the portion of her cheek and brow which was uncovered became deep crimson.

“ I have touched her heart,” thought the rector ; “ no power is so great as that of eloquence,” and he threw himself into his peroration with triumphant exultation, indulging in vehement action suited to his inflated style.

“ Men of position, richly endowed with jewels of the mind, and the precious things of the earth, emulate the example of Boaz, and let the chaste Ruths of your territories share the fruits of your fields and the glory of your name. Comely madonnas, gather to your bosoms these young and beautiful creatures, and let the motherless find liberal mothers in you ; endow them with your best in this life, and leave your possessions in their fair hands when you are called away to sing with the cherubim and seraphim. Chaste and lovely maidens, win love and wealth by your beauty and docility, and bend all your powers to please the

disinterested Boaz, who shall bend to encircle you with the glory of his name! Thus, rising from glory to glory, higher and higher, beyond the song of the skylark and the wing of the floating cloud, we shall attain——”

At this climax of elocution, just when the heavy person of the preacher was lifted on tip-toe, to emphasize his soaring simile, the ill-natured boards in the pulpit gave way with a loud crack, and the yawning gap, formed by the secession of the rotten wood, admitted both legs of the preacher. He would have fallen to the bottom, but that the thickest part of his corpulent person was too large for the hole; and he remained wedged while, with the tenacious perseverance of a true Briton, his husky voice pronounced the last words of his triumphant address, only the top of his head remaining visible to the congregation.

“We shall attain to that effulgence of brilliancy where we shall possess more than heart can desire, and be planted on a summit of glory, which no eye can endure to gaze upon.”

Notwithstanding the embarrassing position in

which he was placed, Dr. Vansettle managed to croak out the blessing, after which the clerk, and the avenged carpenter, extricated him from the ruins of his glorified rostrum. He was shaken and somewhat bruised, but none of our friends ventured to offer their sympathy, sure that in doing so their sense of the ridiculous must overpower their self-command, and, to say the least, negative the compliment.

But though obliged to defer the next step in his preconcerted plot, the rector had no intention of abandoning it. He called at Fairlawn on the earliest day on which he could bear the motion of a carriage, and engaged Lady Mary and Joanna in conversation.

"You are fond of botany, Miss Wallstein?" he said, noticing a bouquet of late autumn flowers on the table.

"Yes, Dr. Vansettle, I am very fond of it."

"Have you seen the curious little crimson plant which grows in the Chase Wood, near my house?"

"No, I have not. You mean the wood through

which the footpath from the village to Elliott's Cray passes?"

"The same. It is a beautiful plant, and of a most rare and curious genus."

"Indeed! You arouse my curiosity."

"You walk every day?"

"Yes, Lady Mary insists on my taking a walk every morning. I drive with her in the afternoon, so I expect to grow stronger than ever."

Lady Mary smiled sweetly.

"You have much to regain, love. You have lost strength and health in your long attendance upon me. Dr. Vansettle," she continued, "I can never sufficiently repay this dear girl's devotion: henceforth she will be to me as a younger sister, or a daughter."

The doctor gave Lady Mary a meaning look. "Very right, very gratifying!" he croaked; then added, "You will never be able to part with her."

"Never, unless it were for her to 'find rest in the house of her husband,'" said Lady Mary, with a tender look at her young friend. Both

smiled in remembering that the expression was a quotation from Ruth.

"It is most motherly of you," said the rector, casting up his eyes as we might imagine a pious frog doing, and in other ways much resembling the said semi-aquatic animal. "It is most motherly of you to send her out to brush the dew off the—the dandelions and daisies at nine o'clock every morning."

Lady Mary looked much amused.

"I do not send her out till ten o'clock, doctor."

"Ah, very maternal!" rejoined the doctor, and took his leave.

Had Henry Dalzell described the strange plant, Joanna would have suspected a plot, and walked in any direction but the one indicated; but she was fairly taken in by the rector, and repaired eagerly at ten o'clock in the morning to the wood in question, following the well-beaten path that led in the direction of Elliott's Cray. As she looked up and down for the weed, her eyes fell on the vast proportions of Dr. Vansettle, advancing to meet her.

“Welcome, sweet girl, to our trysting-place!” exclaimed the doctor, with a horrible ogle. “I thought your ready wit would see into my scheme. How my eyes overflowed with joyful streams, when I saw the object of my worship standing here, like Ruth, among the golden corn!”

There was no corn near, only fir-trees and brushwood; but the doctor was too great a poet to be servile in his description of nature.

Poor Joanna was stupefied by his address, and her astonishment depriving her of utterance, gave him courage to proceed.

“Come to the arms of your Boaz,” he exclaimed, spreading his fins wide; “do not blush and be afraid. Though I know you to be penniless, I endow you freely with my name and my possessions. When worth embraces beauty, self-interest vanishes into thin air!”

He ambled forward, meaning to take her in his arms; but she was not stunned enough to permit that, and she recoiled before him.

“Ah, what is so lovely as female modesty!” he continued, rapturously. “Exquisite, refined, gen-

teelest of angels, she cannot realize my generous devotion! Again I say, have no fear, but throw yourself into your husband's arms!"

By a sudden lurch, he got near enough to take her hand, which he began to mumble over with kisses. She tried to withdraw it.

"Dr. Vansettle," she said, in a tone of deep displeasure, "you have been drinking. I beseech you to go home, and not disgrace yourself further."

"But it will not be a disgrace! Though you are poor, you are honest, and well-born. I have counted the cost, and I make you generous and honourable proposals."

"Release me, sir, I will not listen to your proposals. I distinctly and finally decline any you can make."

"You cannot be in earnest," he said, very much startled and disappointed. "You will have a happy home, and I shall be very kind to you."

"My thanks for your intended honour. Allow me distinctly to decline it!"

"But there must be some mistake! Oh, I see it; you hope to catch Dalzell. Your labour will

be lost in that quarter; he told me himself 'he had no intention whatever of marrying you, for he was too wise a player to stake his knight against a pawn.'"

Joanna turned pale as death.

"When did he say that to you, Dr. Van-settle?"

"At the pic-nic at Boulston. I was sure you would not have me if you had the chance of a baronet; so I took the trouble to find out his intentions before making my own proposals.

"I thank you for your efforts on my behalf. Release my hand, and let me return home."

The old man sank heavily on his knees, still retaining Joanna's hand. "Love me, do love me," he blubbered, and the tears came down from his bleared eyes. "I have never liked a girl so much, and I do want a wife! It's such a pity to turn me off for a man whose attentions are avowedly dishonourable!"

The poor girl started as if stung. She heard voices drawing near, and, with one desperate effort, she wrenched her hand free, and fled in

the direction of the village, leaving the stranded doctor unable to rise from his knees; in which undignified position he was found a minute or two later by Jans, Noel Elliott, and a young friend.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PROPERTY.

Life is joy, and love is power,
Death all fetters doth unbind,
Strength and wisdom only flower
When we toil for all our kind.
Hope is truth—the future giveth
More than present takes away,
And the soul for ever liveth
Nearer God from day to day.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

THE day previous to the pic-nic at Boulston, the Misses Elliott had called upon the new inhabitants of the Manor House at Overstone; but all the family was out, so its acquaintance was not made on that occasion. In the course of the week Mrs. Hammerlye and her two eldest daughters made the return call.

“Now, my dears,” said the mother, as the job-horses trotted along the road, “I beseech you to

be upon your guard. Remember that the ladies we are going to see are not common old maids, but the valued aunts of that Mr. Elliott who owns all the property hereabouts."

"Oh, yes, we know all about that, mamma," replied Emma. "They are the old catth that Dr. Vanthettle told uth about. He thayth they dithpenth all Mr. Elliott'th charitieth, and they attend to him, and worthip him, that it never thtriketh him that he would do well to get a wife. We'll behave to perfectiion, but won't I jutht make a thketh of them afterwardth. Unforthunately we thall not find Mr. Elliott here, ath I feel thure it wath he whom we met riding towardth Overthtone."

"But his friend, Mr. Jans, may very likely be here; Dr. Quiller says he and the Misses Elliott are very thick. Be very careful how you treat him."

"I hope he will be! I have a great curiothity to thee the animal. Dr. Quiller hinted that there wath thome ethpethial reathon for the frequently of hith vithith to Thylvethter, but thurely the Mith Elliott'th are too old for love-making!"

"The older the sillier!" remarked Sophy, who had not before cared to join in the conversation.

"My ambition, ith to thee Mr. Janth, and ather-tain hith order and genuth," continued Emma. "A feline animal, with canine teeth, long thaggy whithkers, round eyeth, which contract and dilate, and a very thleek coat!"

"You have omitted the claws," suggested Sophy.

"Oh, tharp clawth, you may be thure, other-withe he might be tamed, but we may be able to teath him not to thcratch."

"Hush, hush," said Mrs. Hammerlye, "we are at the door."

Margaret Elliott received them cordially: she was engaged with some useful needlework, and a gentleman was reading near her, whom she introduced as Mr. Jans. She apologized for her sister not appearing immediately, by explaining that she was engaged in a little domestic matter. The fact was that she was making beef-tea for a sick man, but Margaret did not consider it necessary to name that; it was not their plan to publish

their deeds of charity to the world. Sophy and Emma exchanged a meaning look, full of contempt at the pre-judged parsimony which could induce a lady to be busy with domestic matters, and the look was not noticed by Margaret Elliott, who was fully engaged in entertaining Mrs. Hammerlye, but was carefully noted down by Mr. Jans.

Mrs. Hammerlye was enchanted with Sylvester.

“Such a delightful view, such a lovely garden! Were such white and yellow chrysanthemums ever seen before! and were not those dwarf ones the kind called pompones? Pity that the village should be so near; it was vexatious to be obliged to hear the children playing in the lane: the vulgar little wretches should be taught that the respect due to “quality” required them to hush their voices when within hearing of genteel houses.”

Margaret’s mirthful expression deceived the lady into the persuasion that her condolences were acceptable, and she went on inveighing against the vulgarity of what she called “low

life," until she ended by asserting that the poor had no right to live at all!

"Oh, we should have a terrible loss if they were taken from us!" replied Margaret, when want of breath compelled her guest to draw the rein upon her eloquence. "I cannot tell you the resource and pleasure they are to us. Of course, we often meet with disappointment, children that we have watched over at school turn out badly, and go very far astray, for a time, at any rate; and the men and women will not be provident and prepare for a rainy day. But we generally find, that if we go on forgiving and loving, the erring ones come back to us; and in the rainy days it is a great joy to us to provide help and shelter; in this we have strong hands to back us, in our nephew, and his friend, Mr. Jans."

She glanced at that gentleman with a sweet smile, and Mrs. Hammerlye bowed insinuatingly, and prepared a fresh budget of small talk.

"I hear you had a delightful pic-nic the other day, Miss Elliott. My girls are very fond of pic-nics—indeed, most young people are! Not

that the taste is confined to the young alone, such simple pleasures cannot lack a charm, even at our age, Miss Elliott."

The two women presented a strong contrast. The comely widow was, at any rate, fifteen good years older than Margaret Elliott, her eldest daughter approaching much nearer her date; but she was thoroughly made up, teeth well-fitted, hair touched up, slight rouge tinting added, and dress of the handsomest to set off the figure. Margaret Elliott, on the other hand, enjoyed the good health and strong nerve of one who has led a country life, with ample pursuits to provide exercise for heart, intellect, and physique, and she had never had to start at a white hair amid her abundant brown tresses, nor to apply to the dentist for relief or restoration. The countenances of the two differed in a greater degree than their persons; Mrs. Hammerlye's was made up, as was her presence, but it was a less successful attempt; the courteous, interested look had more of patent artifice in it than the pearly teeth and enamelled cheek; while Margaret's

clear eyes seemed as the opening of deep wells of truth, and purity, and womanly love.

Presently Bertha entered, looking languid and sad, but she greeted her guests politely, and threw herself into their interests as far as she could divine them.

Mrs. Hammerlye was speaking of our pic-nic at Boulston; she tells me her daughters are fond of such excursions. "Could we not contrive another there during these next few days, that Mrs. Hammerlye's family might join us?" Margaret said to her sister.

"Certainly we might, dear. But I would rather fix no day at present, for Thomas Welsh is so terribly ill that I should not like to be away from home for many hours until some change takes place in him."

"Is he much worse?" asked Margaret, anxiously.

"I fear so. And they don't know who to send for. Dr. Vansettle has been summoned twice, and does not come. I would that he had the counsel and instruction of a good clergyman."

"We will send Dr. Quiller from Overstone," said Mrs. Hammerlye. "He is very learned, and would easily instruct the poor creature."

"My dear madam, he would not come. No clergyman will minister in the parish of another, unless solicited by him to do so. I fear our difficulty is beyond remedy."

"Why does your own rector not go, then? He must be very idle and indifferent."

"We are not called on to judge him," replied Bertha, gently, but her words were rather in reply to an impatient look of Jans' than to what Mrs. Hammerlye had said.

"You know Mr. Dalzell!" exclaimed that lady. "How charming he is! So witty, so full of life, so thoroughly well-bred, so handsome!"

"He is very handsome," was the only rejoinder that Margaret could truthfully make.

Mrs. Hammerlye found that subject unpopular, so she hastened to try another. "Have you heard how Lady Mary Morton is?" she asked.

"Somewhat better. Mr. Stanton says she is recovering, though slowly."

“How lonely for her to have no one near her in her hours of suffering but a paid companion! How bereaved her heart must feel!” Mrs. Hammerlye meant this as a triumphant passage of arms; she was particularly ignorant of the heart and its feelings, but she thought the good ladies would admire her for her sentiments.

“Miss Wallstein is rather like a daughter than a mere paid companion to Lady Mary; indeed, few daughters show the devotion which she has done in this illness. Mr. Stanton says her conduct is beyond all praise.”

“Very creditable—very praiseworthy,” feebly ejaculated Mrs. Hammerlye; “I hope Lady Mary will remember her for it.” She was going to take leave, but saw a gentleman pass the window, and waited for her daughter’s sake.

Noel Elliott, for he was the new visitor, did not bless the Hammerlyes for their presence. He looked graver and more thoughtful than when we last saw him, and the answers he gave to the simpered remarks of the Misses Hammerlye betrayed much absence of mind. But had they

been willing to take offence with him, which they were not, all his sins would have been forgiven, when, on handing them into their carriage, he expressed his intention of calling at the Manor House in the course of a few days. Emma had been cultivating the acquaintance of Mr. Jans, and had roused him from his apathy by a startling allusion to "that darling, Mr. Hume."

"What!" exclaimed Jans, in horror. "Have you seen him and his tricks?"

"Oh, yeth, it wath tho nithe to hear the dear thpirits."

Emma did not think it wasted time to lisp in the bosom of the family, so she was an adept at doing it when in company.

"Don't you think it would be very nithe to die?" she asked, with a pathetic look.

"I can't say I have any longings in that direction. Are you also a spiritualist, Miss Hammerlye?"

"No, not quite. That is, I don't believe in their raps."

"We won't discuss it to-day. Some other

time I may break a lance with Miss Emma on the subject. Are you fond of science?"

"Oh, tho fond!"

"And of metaphysics?"

"Oh, yeth, I love them betht of all!"

"Delightful! I shall have some famous tilts with you."

Noel's entrance at this juncture broke off the dialogue; for what lady could be expected to attend to a mere philosopher when a marriageable squire was present!

"What is all this about poor Welsh?" asked Noel anxiously, as he returned to the room.

"We fear lock-jaw is coming on; the poor fellow gives such strong spasmodic starts that it causes agony in the broken leg, and his face is becoming so rigid."

"Has Stanton seen him?"

"Yes, it is he who explained to me both the cause and probable effect of these spasms. He does not despair of life, for the poor fellow has lost two teeth, and that enables them to insert a tube and give him beef-tea and brandy, so the

doctor thinks there is yet a hope that strength of constitution may triumph. The poor fellow is extremely uneasy, and asks in a half-articulate way for a parson."

"God help him! Have they sent for that wretched sot, Vansettle?"

"They have sent twice, and he takes no notice."

Noel's lips were compressed. "My father little thought what he was doing in appointing him to the living! But he used not to be so absolutely good for nothing. I say, Jans, what will the fairy of the water babies, Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, do to our rector when he comes into her country?"

"She won't have him in her country. She only deals with those who sin out of ignorance. Liars and sensualists go elsewhere." Jans spoke between his teeth, evidently deeply angered.

"But our poor people die untaught, except for my dear aunt's instructions. I wonder if Van would consent to have a curate if I paid him. That is not a bad idea. What say you all?"

"I think he would be glad of him," said Bertha.

"So do I, provided he did not expect ever to be allowed to preach," added Margaret.

"Ditto, ditto," said Jans, "and I know the right man."

"Who? who?" was asked on all sides.

"A fellow of the name of Marriott, a true-hearted, hard-working, sensible man. Joanna knows him too."

Noel started, then said, in a low, sad tone,—

"Another suitor for her, perhaps: you know the saying about carrying coals to Newcastle?"

"Keep up your heart; he is a married man, with ever so many little children."

"Then, do you write to him, Jans, and open the subject to him, and I will go and talk the rector over. In the meanwhile, I will go to poor Welsh myself, and see if anything can be done."

Bertha accompanied her nephew, for she was so anxious about the sufferer, that she could scarcely endure to be absent from his cottage, and Jans remained with Margaret.

"Dear Noel is looking ill, and is sadly out of spirits," said the latter.

"Yes, he is all wrong somehow. I suspect he is in love with Joanna, and won't come forward, because he thinks she cares for Dalzell. He has only once spoken on the subject to me, and then I tormented him so, that he made me promise to give no hint to her, directly or indirectly. How I wish Dalzell would run away, or get married, or hang himself. It would make me so happy to see Joanna, Noel's wife."

"Just what I long for. And Bertha has come round to my view, and you also! This marriage for Noel is the highest ambition of my life!"

"It is not the highest ambition of mine," said Jans.

"What is your highest ambition?" she asked, in her cordial tone; but looking up from her work, as she paused for his reply, she wished she had not asked it. He was very much agitated, and spoke with difficulty.

"A loving wife for myself!"

Silence again ensued, and then he added,—

"You cannot fail to know, Margaret, that I have loved you for many years. Only a month ago, the legacy of a distant relative increased my income sufficiently to make it honourable in me to ask you to share it. Despite Noel's friendship, I am lonely and depressed: will you give me the joy of a home?"

Margaret Elliott did not exclaim, nor sob, nor rush from the room. She laid her hand in his quietly, and he needed no spoken word.

When Bertha and Elliott reached the bedside of the sick man, they found a fellow-labourer seated by him. Even in the hour which had elapsed since Bertha's last visit the rigidity of the face had increased, and the spasms had become stronger and more frequent. Welsh's hand was clasped in the hard, horned one of his friend.

"You have come to help to nurse your friend, Paynton?"

"Yes, ma'am. Him and I were carters together, and have been comrades for many a year. Him's gotten no wife, nor mother, to hold his

hand at the last, so I'm the right man to be here. And we went to school together, too, sir," he added, addressing Elliott, "and maybe, if we says the Lord's prayer together, me saying and him thinking, when we comes outside the Lord's door, them inside may be pleased to take him in."

"Those inside are but the Lord's servants, like ourselves, Paynton, and they are put there to open the door to all who come to the Lord our Father, asking entrance in the name of Jesus Christ."

"Ay, ay, sir, there's that in my heart that says you are right, though I couldn't find words to say it in. You heard what the squire said, Bill, and you may be sure he's right. The squire has as much learning as the parson, and isn't paid for showing folks the way upwards; so when he does it, he does it out o' his own certainty and good-will. We may hold to what he says, lad."

The sick man nodded, and, looking appealingly at Noel, tried to give utterance to something. His friend listened, and then interpreted.

“He wants to say, sir, that when poor folks come to the hall, it isn’t t’ master that’s like to speak rough to them, but t’ servants. And he would like to know if there’ll be any such ways at the great house above?”

“My friend, you never found a servant rude when the master was within sight and hearing?”

The sick man shook his head, and the quick look of intelligence and peace shining in his eyes, showed that the mind had at once applied the illustration. He spoke again after a while, but it was only one word, “Pray.”

Noel was sorely perplexed. He had never prayed aloud without a book, and the presence of his aunt increased the nervousness of the matter. He was ashamed of his moral cowardice, and, by a strong effort mastering the weakness, he knelt beside his farm-servant, and, in a few strong simple words, pleaded our common claim on the fatherhood of God, our double title through adoption, and appealed to the atonement and brotherhood of Christ, for a full entrance into the house prepared near him.

The sick man and his friend were deeply touched and comforted ; the squire gave no money, but he said, with a smile,—

“If anything is wanted send to the Hall, you shall find all you need there.”

Returning to Sylvester, they found Jans and Margaret sitting as they had left them, and Jans went back with Noel to Elliott's Cray. Then Margaret sat down on a low stool by her sister, laid her head in her lap, and burst into tears.

Bertha had been more like a mother than a sister to her from childhood ; she had had strong suspicions of the state of Jans' heart, and she needed no explanation of the cause of Margaret's emotion. She stroked her hair tenderly, and, after a short silence, said,—

“There is no pain in this, dearest, it need not even separate us. You have long supplied the executive element in this house, and been mistress in all but the name. I will now take my ease, and be your lodger. We shall be so happy !”

CHAPTER XV.

SOLILOQUIES.

It is to linger on "the magic face
Of human beauty," and from light and shade
Alike to draw a lesson, 'tis to love
The cadences of voices that are tuned
By majesty and purity of thought :
It is to love all virtue for itself,
All nature for its breathing evidence ;
And when the eye hath seen, and when the ear
Hath drunk the beautiful harmony of the world,
It is to humble the imperfect mind,
And lean the broken spirit upon God.—N. B. WILLIS.

On that memorable morning, late in October, Noel Elliott set forth for a day's shooting. He had a guest sojourning with him, a young sailor, the grandson of his friend and neighbour, Mr. Walsingham. It was Sydney's return from his first voyage, and all old friends were eager to welcome and entertain the young middy. Noel had been

getting old of late, and now that he contrasted his temperament with that of the merry lad, he felt quite a patriarch.

“Hallo, what have we here?” exclaimed Sydney Walsingham, springing on ahead the moment that they caught a glimpse of Dr. Vansettle in his devotional posture. “Surely we have got a naturalized Indian faquir, not that he looks much like it!”

“Give me a hand, good youth, to aid me to rise!” asked Dr. Vansettle, with a desperate attempt at dignified composure.

By this time Elliott and Jans had reached the spot, and suppressing their inclination to laugh, they pulled the rector up, and set him on those insufficient props of his, called legs. “Have you been praying here all night, Mr. Rector,” asked Noel, with a slightly sarcastic curl of the lip, “and become stiffened in the position?”

“Haw, haw!” laughed the rector, but it was a forced and hollow laugh. “Not exactly, my dear friend, not exactly; I pray early, and often come to this secluded retreat to meditate, but not for the whole night. Oh, no!”

“Your retreat is not very secluded, doctor, but that is better for your purpose. People who can’t rise from their knees alone, do well to say their prayers beside a public footpath. It is a pity you did not manage this a little earlier in the season, that the harvesters might have had the benefit of your example, and have seen a true exemplification of your favourite Boaz.”

The doctor turned livid. His complexion had gradually assumed so extremely unwholesome a hue, composed of a mixture of yellow and liver colour, that when anger or any emotion caused fresh colour to mount to his face, it became a purple crimson. It flashed upon him that Noel must have overheard his conversation with Joanna, for he forgot that Sunday’s sermon had filled all minds with Boaz and his lady friends. He was relieved, however, by young Walsingham, to whom they had described the Sunday scene; and Noel’s remark flashing upon his mind the fact that this was the identical parson, he rushed to him with extended hand, exclaiming,—

“The cats bless us! Have I the good fortune of making the acquaintance of Dr. Vansettle?”

"Happy to know you, my young friend!" croaked the rector, as the boy wrung his hand.

"Oh, sir," continued the sailor, "how I envy those who sit under you." He telegraphed his meaning to Jans by a shrewd glance at the massive person of Vansettle.

"Ah!" replied the gratified preacher, "all do not value that privilege as they ought!" He glanced at Noel, for he had taken deep affront at his proposal of a curate, and rejected the same with disdain.

"Oh!" continued Sydney, with exaggerated enthusiasm, "what would I have given to have heard your sermon upon Ruth, and—and to have seen—Ruth herself! But you will very soon have to leave Irskill, doctor."

"Why, why?" asked the doctor, uneasily.

"Oh, because the Queen cannot fail to hear of that sermon, and when she does so the result is plain; a telegram desiring you to wait on her Majesty, a scarf given by her own fair hands, a canonry at Westminster, and constant attendance at Court."

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"Heaven speed the day!" ejaculated Noel. "You have our best wishes for the realization of the vision, doctor."

"Haw, haw, thank you!" said the old man, very uncertain whether the squire meant a compliment or the reverse. They had reached the village, and were near his house, so he scuffled away, and got free from his tormentors.

"What had the old hypocrite been up to, Mr. Elliott? Of course all about saying his prayers was a big cram. What a rare specimen he is! a tortoise walking on its hind legs. And how he swallowed my gammon! oh, was it not neat? He could not have imbibed a basin of soup made of his first cousin the turtle more neatly."

"He would not have imbibed it half so neatly," rejoined Noel. "You have hit upon the most disgusting habit of his life for an illustration of 'neatness.' If you saw him tuck a napkin under his massive chin, and begin to lap his soup, spilling half of every spoonful over his whiskers and face, and throwing his tongue far out to catch stray drops, making a sound the while like the lapping

of a hundred of your benedictory cats, you would be careful how you recalled the disgusting image to your mind !”

“Je-hosh-a-phat!” was the midshipman’s rejoinder, “the last new expletive,” he explained, noticing Noel’s wondering look ; “no, not quite the newest, ‘the cats bless us,’ is a shade more recent.”

They could not resist turning in at Sylvester, and relating the story of the rector. “I wonder if Joanna had anything to do with it?” suggested Margaret. “I am sure from that sermon that he had designs upon her.”

Jans started. This, then, had been his reason for inventing that odious scandal about Dalzell. He has meant to bring him into disrepute, that the coast might be clear for himself.

“Designs upon Joanna!” ejaculated Noel. “The reptile, has his conceit no bounds?”

“Oh, what a lark! He is wild—a wild ass, and no mistake! I wish he would ask me to spend a day with him; how I would draw him out!”

“There is no such luck for you,” growled

Jans; "the rector invites no one but gamblers, and only those whose play is inferior to his own."

"Then the beast is rich! I will court him, and make him put me in his will!"

"You need not try that on, Sydney. All that he has will go to his servant, and it ought to do so," rejoined Noel, gravely; his aunts looked puzzled, and the sportsmen proceeded on their way.

That night Joanna retired to her room with a heavier heart than she had borne for many a day. She wished Lady Mary good-night; and, putting out her light, sat in the rays of the winter's moon, wrapped in deep and painful thought.

"He had surely no cause to insult me. I think I have been prudent in my bearing towards him: sometimes I have accused myself of using unnecessary caution; but no, no, it was not unnecessary. Perhaps he has not meant to give me the impression that he loved me: he has not spoken much—very little, indeed, that one could build expectations upon;—but his tone has expressed more than

his words, and his eyes more than either. I have surely made a grand mistake, and been cherishing vain imaginings. And they have not increased my happiness; if his look, and the pressure of my hand, made my heart beat quicker, it left also a painful feeling that I was all but loving, and that he was not good. The attachment has brought me far more pain than pleasure, and now—God helping me, now that I know he has been meaning nothing, I will step clean out of it. He shall dwell in my thoughts no more; and when I see him, I will remember that whatever he says is mere admiration, the amusement of the hour, and carries no deeper meaning contained within it. Yes, such shall be my solemn resolve. In God's sight, I vow to exterminate every interest in him, excepting the merely friendly." Her hands were clasped upon her knee, her head raised, and her eyes fixed on the sky, as her pallid lips spoke her solemn vow.

Her head was aching terribly, and she laid it on her pillow with little hope of sleep. She tried to feel that nothing happened by chance, and that

her heavenly Father had permitted the twofold insult of the rector's proposal, and Dalzell's speech of her, for some wise purpose; but it was all a mystery to her, and weariness and pain dulled her powers of reason. But her religion was essentially womanly; she felt out her faith rather than reasoned it out, and as trial dims intellect long before heart, her trust was anchored in the surest ground, and no strain perilled its safety. So the weary suffering night passed slowly on, and, amid the wreck of earthly hope, she clung closely to the love of God.

And what is Dalzell doing?

He has passed the evening with the Hammerlyes, Sophy has talked badinage to him, Emma has lisped to him, Julia has sung to him, Mrs. Hammerlye has exhausted devices to please him, even little Charlotte has put forth her claim to notice. He has seemed far more intimate with them than he has ever been with Joanna, and a hint that he has thrown out for a stolen meeting in the wood, he feels sure will not be allowed to lapse. But, as he leaves the gates, and walks

rapidly along the road towards Overstone, he also indulges in a soliloquy.

“What a cursed bore it is that nice girls are always poor, and ugly disagreeable girls roll in wealth! A still greater curse that men should be poor, and so compelled to take rich wives. Those girls there are ready to throw themselves at one’s head! I might have kissed Sophy in the conservatory, and should have done so, for she is a fine woman; but I just thought that the dowager might presume thereon to “ask me my intentions.” No, madam, I have no intentions, I assure you. A fellow must live, and to live he must be amused; but it must be a larger fortune than that which you can divide among your four daughters, which shall tempt Henry Dalzell into the snare of matrimony! I only wish Joanna lived here, and they, as far off at Fairlawn! Not that it would benefit me much. The witch is such a slave to duty, that she would never let me take up her time to the detriment of Lady Mary, nor enjoy the sweets of a stolen interview without a full confession to her duenna. But what a choice article it is—the

nicest thing in girls that I have seen for many a day. Of course, she can never be more to me than she is now, for, however I may deceive myself with false hopes that some day she may unbend, and allow me to stand on a more familiar footing, I know the hopes are false. I wish I could run away with her; but there is such an impenetrable dignity about the little woman, that I dare not meet her eyes if I had placed her in a questionable light. No; it is quite plain that I can get no further without compromising myself by a proposal, and that is out of the question.

'Tis gold, 'tis gold
Shall buy my heart, shall buy my hand!'"

He turned into the billiard-room of the principal hotel, and we forbear longer to accompany his steps.

And Noel Elliott.

The wise man says, "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet;" and as Mr. Elliott had been astir since daybreak, passed all the day with his gun upon his shoulder, patrolling the wood in search of pheasants, and had dined sparingly afterwards,

spending the evening in business discussions with his steward, we hold him entitled to a share of the sweet sleep of the labourer. But as the hunter's moon floods his chamber he paces backwards and forwards across the floor, and his thoughts, though deep enough, seem to have no calm.

"I have slept too long," he soliloquized, "and let the golden opportunities pass by, and now I awake to see what I have lost. Alone in the world, I yearn for love, and none meets me; I strive to do right, but fall far short of my aim. When I felt no need, I had strength enough and to spare; now when I hear the cry of rich and poor for aid, I am weak as a child. Oh, for a voice to re-assure me, a hand to stay the tremulousness of mine. Oh, for one I could love to be beside me, to calm and to fortify. What a fool I have been! For two years I was content to meet her on the path; look on her as a thing of beauty, only made to be admired and pass on. I only began to love just as that serpent came in the way, and lived in my house only to steal my costliest jewel. . . . If I was a fool, then, for my insensibility,

I am doubly a fool now for raving; for what am I? A steward—and how inefficient; in many things, how unfaithful! She would help me, she would hold a light before me, and aid me to be faithful in all things, a true keeper to my brother. And she *will* help me!”

He paused, and stood gazing at the broad shadows thrown by the trees in the park, and the clear moonlight surrounding them. In that pale light he could see the roof of Fairlawn, and two windows in the second story, one of which he knew belonged to Joanna's room. He fixed his eyes on this, and, as he did so, the trouble in his look abated, the brow smoothed, and the lips took a form expressing resolution. After some time, he spoke again, in a low calm voice,—

“And she will help me! It is not the outward form of beauty that I love, but the more intimate likeness to Divinity in the inner mind. Fortitude, truth, self-sacrifice, faith, and love: these are the beauties which have enslaved my heart. The influence of these may be about me, though I should never again so much as take her hand in

mine. I will fix my eyes on her, as on a star in heaven, and aim continually to become worthy to enshrine such an image in my heart. She shall bind me to all good, and make evil impossible to me. The days are past for the cavalier to wear a lady's glove in his helmet, but I will wear her memory in brain and heart, and God shall be my witness how I will strive that it shall seem no anomaly there!"

Thus, as Dalzell turned into the gambling-house to court forgetfulness of the being whose womanly excellence tantalized and curbed him, and she accepted the pain of being insulted and forsaken as the mysterious discipline of one in whose love she could not doubt, Noel Elliott,

Made to her
For love, an offering of purity.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

We did but talk you over, pledge you all
In wassail ; often, like as many girls—
Sick for the hollies and the yews of home—
As many little trifling Lillias—play'd
Charades and riddles as at Christmas here,
And what's my thought, and when, and where, and how,
And often told a tale from mouth to mouth,
As here at Christmas.—TENNYSON'S *Princess*.

"It is a great bore," said Jans, as he packed Margaret Elliott closely and snugly into her pony carriage on the 26th of December, "that everybody should be going to 'Granny Walsingham's Christmas' except myself!"

"Whose fault is that?" rejoined Margaret. "You told Granny herself last Christmas that a party of children and young people would bore you to death, and you tried in her presence to

dissuade me from going to help her to entertain them! Of course she regards you as the leader of the opposition."

"I was ever so much older then than I am now!" he said, with a genial smile. "I declare I would go with you and proclaim my conversion to Granny in full court, to get another invitation, only that Noel has left all his projects in my charge for the week, and you have consigned Bertha to my care. I consider myself 'odd man' to both establishments at present. Shall I turn the pony round?"

"No, thank you. I am going to call for Joanna."

"What, is she going too? Worse and worse. Really Lady Mary is very kind!"

"She is indeed. She had been praising her up to Granny, which inspired her with a strong wish to have her at her 'Christmas,' and Lady Mary overruled all Joanna's objections. But I am more sorry than glad, for the Hammerlyes have asked Granny to invite 'their friends, Mr. Dalzell and Mr. Penrose,' and I have such a dread of our

pet becoming engaged to that man. Yet I hardly think he would wish to marry a penniless girl, even with Joanna's beauty and charm."

"I don't know what to think! He is a puzzle to me. Oh, that the Commander-in-Chief would order him off to India or elsewhere!"

Off started the pony, and Margaret Elliott did not draw rein till she reached Fairlawn.

Joanna was waiting for her, and Lady Mary came to the door to see her wrapped up.

"You will take care of the dear girl, Miss Elliott?" she said; "she has not been herself for some time; indeed, she has never recovered her looks since my illness; I hope the fun at Granny Walsingham's will set her right again. But oh, Miss Elliott, you don't know what an obstinate girl she is! I wanted to give her some pretty dresses to wear there; but no, not one would she accept! Her grey linsey for a morning, and white muslin for evenings, are all she will wear, and not a trinket will she put on. I never saw a girl so utterly regardless of her appearance."

"No, no, Lady Mary," replied Joanna, kissing

her affectionately; "I like to look well just as much as other girls do. But I won't have jewels and dresses, for I can't bear to make your love subservient to my adornment. You fill my life with happiness; pray let me keep my gratitude clear from the plague-spot of self-interest. I will be obstinate in nothing else. Don't you think I am right, Miss Elliott?"

"Quite right, dear, and so does Lady Mary. And we both know you don't need dress and jewellery to set off your charms. We must leave you, Lady Mary, for I wish to be early, to help Granny to receive her guests."

As they reached the door of the quaint rambling old building, known as Sutton Court, granny peered out of the library. "Come here, Margaret, my dear," she said, "I want your help. Miss Wallstein will excuse you," and she hurried Margaret away.

Joanna remained in the hall; she stood irresolute, not knowing which way to go; two girls coming down-stairs attracted her attention, and she cast an inquiring look at them.

The elder was tall and fair, with bright brown eyes, pencilled eyebrows, and chestnut hair; she advanced towards Joanna with a winning smile, and Joanna then noticed that her mouth was remarkably pretty. "If you are a stranger here let me show you your way," she said. "At Granny Walsingham's 'Christmas' nobody is accounted a guest; we all entertain ourselves, have full liberty to do what we like, and, of course, get into scrapes innumerable. Come to our room, or, if you will tell me your name, I will find yours for you."

"My name is Joanna Wallstein."

"Will you come too, Kate?"

"Yes, for Gregory is not to be found."

"You must allow us in our turn to introduce ourselves, Miss Wallstein. I am Janet Dawson, and my sister's name is Kate. We live at a village ten miles off, and our annual visit here is the best fun we can get in the twelvemonth. Of course you know Granny?"

"I have seen her. But the rest of the family are strangers to me."

"Have you never seen Gregory?" exclaimed

Kate; "you will then be startled. He is lame and hump-backed, so ugly, and so clever. Oh, he is such a lamb!"

"He is tremendously spoilt, Miss Wallstein. He expects every one to do his bidding. He is engaged to Susan Morris, and both she and Kate idolize him."

"Yes, we are his two squires. Susan has played me a shabby trick, to carry him off before I arrived, but I'll have it out of her. I have got some jolly new songs to sing, and won't that make her jealous!"

Janet looked afraid lest Joanna should think her sister too bold; but Kate enjoyed her astonishment. She was much less than her sister, decidedly petite, and with deep grey eyes, long, brown lashes, and an abundancy of soft dark curls,—the very creature to be daring and piquant, and yet no one able to find it in his heart to blame her.

They traversed a long passage, on the doors opening from which were written, in chalk, the names of the intended inhabitants. At the end of

that passage two others branched off, one leading down some steps into rooms evidently intended for servants, the other conducting at right angles to a line of small rooms, built over the stables. On the first was written, "Janet and Kate Dawson," and on the next, "Margaret Elliott and Joanna Wallstein."

The two girls entered the second room with their new friend, stirred up the fire, accommodated her cloak and hat in a drawer, carefully leaving half the space in every arrangement for aunt Margaret. The furniture was simple in style and scanty in quantity, but there were writing materials, and a Bible on the table.

"Hark," exclaimed Kate, "that's Gregory's whistle," and she threw open the window, as an uncouth figure, followed by a grizzled terrier, shuffled into the stable yard.

Kate wrapped herself in the curtain, so that he might not see her. "You are whistling out of tune, Greg," she cried.

"Oh, it's the wicket gate!" he exclaimed, "where are you? Come forth and show your

hideous proportions. Come out, that my Cerberus may devour you."

"Do you call that grindled dog, Cerberus?"

"Grindled! oh, you blunderer, grindled, ha, ha! You mean brindled, infant, and even then the term is misapplied."

"I meant grindled, Greg; grindled is too good a word for such a brute."

"Do you call Ben a brute! oh, Kate, how foolish and unkind!" He looked really hurt, and eyed the tier of windows defiantly; all were open, and he was sure she was lurking near one of them. Kate's heart was touched, and she replied,—

"The dog's a beauty, a real lamb of a dog; I was only aggravating you, Greg. Come in, and let's get to some fun!"

He smiled, and kissed his hand to the row of windows, and then entered the house. "Come down," said Kate, eagerly, and then asked Joanna, "Do you think me very improper, indeed?"

"No," said Joanna, smiling, "only a little so."

Kate pouted, she stamped her foot pettishly, her eyes dancing with good nature and kindliness the

while. "Please don't think me a little anything," she said; "I like to be very much, or not at all."

"Then I will think you hugely improper," replied Joanna; and the trio went downstairs.

They found a large party assembled in the great hall. The cripple was entering by the garden door, and Kate danced forward to meet him. Janet still remained beside Joanna.

"This is Sydney Walsingham," she said, "a midshipman on his first leave, and a great affliction to our Granny; and these are Ellie, and Hatty, and Frances, his sisters."

"I say, Kate, who is that lovely girl?" whispered Gregory; "introduce me at once." Kate advanced to present the cripple to Miss Wallstein.

"Now, Janet, leave all introductions to me; I know people, and you don't," he said.

"Allow me to present the Christmas chaplain, the Reverend George Symonds, Miss Wallstein."

A tall gentlemanlike man bowed somewhat stiffly; he evidently felt himself no unimportant member of the community.

The Miss Dawsons you know already : happy you if you never know them any better ! Miss Byrne is a new friend to you, but a very old one to us, and here come the four Miss Hammerlyes, like a squadron of vessels in full sail. Their hair is lighter in a descending scale, and you may always know their ages by comparing the shades. Those two officers, Lieutenant Dalzell and Ensign Penrose, are invited here as their guard of honour. It would not be safe to trust four such belles in our steeple, among such unhewn block-heads as we are, Symonds of course excepted."

The Miss Hammerlyes assumed a very cordial tone with every member of the Walsingham party, and they smiled graciously as they bowed to Janet Dawson and bonny Kate ; but they acknowledged Joanna by the slightest perceptible inclination, and voted afterwards that it was bad taste in Granny to bring a poor companion among well-bred and independent people.

A great out-door bell rang, and Gregory explained its meaning to Miss Wallstein. "That indicates that corn and bran-mashes, which we

conventionally call tea and toast, will be served in twenty minutes. The animals of this menagerie are required to comb their manes and rub their feet, and put new collars on before feeding, so let every one repair to his den."

Many had already ascended the broad oak stair, and Joanna followed their example, and found her friend awaiting her in their room.

Hastily unpacking her small box, she produced a little tin case, which Lady Mary had bid her not open till evening. It was full of Christmas roses, with a few sprays of Portugal laurel. Joanna unpacked for Margaret, too, and gave her greatest attention to attiring her; she would fain have persuaded her to wear the Christmas roses, assuring her that they would just suit her black tulle dress, but Margaret positively refused them; for, in good truth, blue ribbons in her hair, and at her throat, suited her best.

"Joanna, you will be late," she exclaimed; "do make haste and attend to your own toilette."

Joanna obeyed, but her heart was heavy, and she dreaded the evening. But in gratitude for

Lady Mary's kind thought, she fastened Christmas roses in her dark hair, and adorned her simple dress with a bouquet of the same, nestling among laurel leaves.

Margaret was to make tea, so she hastened down, and Joanna was not long before she followed her. The tea-room was beyond the hall, and as she crossed to it she came face to face with Dalzell.

"What an age it is since I have seen you, Miss Wallstein," he said, bending to look into her eyes. "I have been so unlucky in always finding you out when I have called of late."

It was a hard struggle to her to answer him, but she had resolved to allow herself neither to feel pain nor anger, and she would not be a traitor to herself. So she looked him calmly in the face, and answered,—“We were spending the day at Sylvester when you last called. We found your card on the table on our return.”

“And did you give a thought to the bitter disappointment from which I was suffering at that moment, Miss Wallstein?”

"No, Mr. Dalzell. If we had thought at all on the question we should have felt sure that a brave soldier would bear disappointment heroically."

"Ah, Miss Wallstein, you do not know the misery of such a disappointment!"

"Probably not. Is this the tea-room?"

He led her into the room. Whether he would have done so at once is very doubtful, had not a tremendous ring sounded at the hall door.

A moment after, and Noel Elliott was announced. He had walked up from Overstone, where he had left his carriage, finding that Dr. Quiller's curate, and his two brothers, Charles and Tom Smith, were bound for the same goal. The hall-door was half glass, and by the glow of the blazing fire the new comers saw Dalzell fronting them, his head bent, his countenance full of tender admiration of a white-robed lady whose back was turned to them. Both the lads and their reverend brother began to joke about the pretty scene; but Noel, who guessed at once who the lady was, pushed past them, and rang the peal at the bell which decided Dalzell to enter the drawing-room.

As Noel greeted Joanna, she smiled brightly, and her whole face expressed pleasure. This would have made some men vain; but he only read in her cordial eyes that she understood that he had accepted once and for ever the place of mere friendship with regard to her, and he strengthened his resolution to become worthy to rank as her friend.

When tea was over, Gregory proposed music, proclaiming that the Wicket Gate was going to sing.

"No, no, Gregory," she whispered, "Susan must sing first. She ought to do so in this house."

Susan sang: she was very fair, and very different to Kate, but the two enhanced each other's charms by contrast.

"Now you must sing, Kate," he said, as Susan finished. "Let us have the parody on 'My earrings! my earrings!'"

"Ah, no, I cannot sing that in a mixed company. So many strangers are present."

"Then will you sing it to me in the growlery?"

“To you and Susan? yes.”

“And to me also, Miss Dawson?” pleaded Sydney.

“To you, too, if you like to be of the party.”

Gregory made a grimace at Sydney, which did not add to his beauty. “You are a nice little boy, ain’t you?” he said. Then turning to the company, he proclaimed loudly,—

“The Wicket Gate has an improper song to sing, but she prefers singing it to Sydney and me alone in our workshop.”

“Oh, Gregory, how ungenerous!” exclaimed Kate, her eyes filling with tears; but Sydney avenged her; for, springing on a chair, he cried,—

“The last invention of Richard the Third, in default of smothering his nephew. I shall rejoin my ship to-morrow; for my life is not safe here, since Miss Kate Dawson has answered me civilly, in presence of my gentle uncle.”

Kate was not one to bear malice. She was more sorry for Gregory now than angry with him; for she knew that that allusion to Richard

the Third would touch him on that most sensitive point, his deformity. She lent all her powers to promote the general amusement of the assembled guests, and soon got vocalists enough together to sing glees, and good-humour prevailed everywhere.

“Don’t you sing any sacred music, Miss Dawson?” asked Noel. “I am so fond of it.”

“Then I will try to get up a choir, Mr. Elliott. What should you like us to sing?”

“Anything of Handel’s, or Hamilton’s ancient hymns.”

“I have both the ‘Star of Hope’ and the ‘Midnight Sunrise,’ by Hamilton, but to do them justice they require a full set of voices; then, they are beautiful in the extreme. We have plenty of sopranos and bass voices, I should think; but mezzo-sopranos and tenors are scarce. However, I will try.”

The slight airy figure moved away, and, as Joanna sat talking merrily to Hatty and Frances Walsingham, a voice said in her ear,—

“Miss Wallstein, will you be so kind as to sing

with us? Yours is the only mezzo-soprano voice in the company."

"How do you know that I have any voice, or have ever learned my notes?"

"The first by ear, the second by intuition," said Kate, merrily; then added, "No one can hear your voice without being struck by its beauty."

Joanna examined the girl's face; it was artless and truthful in the extreme. She followed her to the piano.

Kate had made up her choir. Julia Hammerlye was a first-rate musician; her mother built all her hopes on her music, and kept her to it as to a winning game, willingly affording her every advantage. The hymn was new to her, but she was making the best use she could of the pause to learn her part. Mr. Symonds patronized the composer to the extent of having his music sung in his church on all high festivals, and he lent his own fine tenor voice to do it further justice—to what greater height could his ambition soar?

For the same reason, Mr. Smith was "up" in the bass. Only Joanna felt slightly embarrassed; but she conned the alto carefully, and prepared to do her best.

The hymn was "The Midnight Sunrise," and never were notes contrived that better called forth the beauty of voice and instrument. All sang admirably, but Joanna was the only one whose spirit fully harmonized with the spirit of the hymn; therefore her solo had a touching power which the others lacked—truly it was sung with heart "tenerezza,"—

Offspring of a Virgin Mother,
Lord of glory, yet our brother,
Men and angels greet each other
On thy glad nativity.

When the chorus ended, silence ensued. A few moments and Dalzell asked for the other hymn by the same author; but there was a solemnity in his voice which none had heard before.

"You had better sing the soprano this time, Kate, and I will ask Miss Hammerlye to play the accompaniment," whispered Gregory.

"No, thank you; hers is a fuller voice, and she does more justice to the music," was the reply.

Several other pieces of music followed, but none produced so strong an effect upon the listeners as "The Midnight Sunrise" had done.

"Granny, dear," said Ellie Walsingham, at breakfast, next morning, "what do you say about the Grantley concert?"

"I didn't say anything about it, love."

"Well, but what will you say? We should all like to go."

"My dear, I don't keep a carriage. If the steady folks, those, I mean, whom I know to be steady, will go, and any of you choose to walk, why I have no objection; but I can't suggest any other plan of your getting there. It is a choral concert, Mr. Elliott, but only a village affair, and you would not care to go."

"How far is it?" asked Margaret.

"Too far for you to walk," replied Granny.
"Three miles off!"

"Oh, do say you will go," pleaded Frances, throwing her arms round Joanna. "Granny will

trust us with you, for she said last night your manner was so gentle and ladylike, and you were so good, and we were to try to be like you."

Poor Joanna blushed painfully.

"I know Miss Wallstein takes long walks," said Dalzell, in a low tone.

She raised her eyes, and met those of Noel Elliott; he had heard Dalzell's remark, and not Frances's, and he thought he read the reason of the blush.

"Will you go?" she asked, thankful for the purity of purpose she read in his grave kind face.

"Gladly, if it will make you more at ease."

She thanked him with a grateful look, and promised Frances she would take charge of her. Those who were going to the concert remained in the house all day; but this was a style of thing that Kate could not stand. So she and Susan wandered by the Bath chair in which Gregory went his rounds, singing to him in the clear frosty air, or playing a merry game of repartee. The result was that both were so tired that Kate was glad to go quietly off to bed at nine o'clock,

only regretting that poor Ben must be left without any one to notice him.

"Take him with you," said Ellie; "he knows he has no friends but you. Miss Elliott is sure to stay up until they all come home, and it will be awfully lonely for you in that passage alone."

So Ben got leave to go with Kate to her room. Gregory and Susan had gone to the concert in his donkey carriage.

Mr. Symonds had surely been reckoned among the "steady ones," by Granny, for he had the power of quelling the spirits of all within a certain distance of him. Happily he did not like walking fast, so the party attached to the donkey carriage managed to keep well ahead. As for Joanna, she had a difficult part to play. Dalzell was determined to walk by her, and, unfortunately, Noel played into his hands, fancying he was thereby giving her pleasure. But she sheltered herself by keeping Frances beside her, and the party reached the village in due time. The music proved very second-rate, and Gregory insisted he should not know the things unless he were told their names,

so he procured a programme, and made Hatty and Susan affix it with a pin to Mr. Symonds' coat collar, who was seated immediately before him. "It is doing the prig a kindness to turn him to profit for once, redeeming his day from its intense vapidness. And he is admirably adapted for the purpose, for having some years since swallowed the poker, he can't stoop if he wished ever so much." Some of the songs were vulgar, one in particular, the chorus of which consisted of the epigrammatic lines—

Who could resist her,
Jones's sister ?

But all served to provoke fun and merriment, and that was what most of them had gone to seek.

Joanna's motive was kindness to Frances, and Noel's kindness to Joanna, and had they not also met with a full measure of success !

As they left the village, Noel succeeded in securing Frances's hand ; and Emma Hammerlye coming up at the moment, asked, "Do let me walk by you, Mithter Elliott, I am tho frightened in the dark." He could do no less than offer his arm !

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Joanna examined the girl's face; it was artless and truthful in the extreme. She followed her to the piano.

Kate had made up her choir. Julia Hammerlye was a first-rate musician; her mother built all her hopes on her music, and kept her to it as to a winning game, willingly affording her every advantage. The hymn was new to her, but she was making the best use she could of the pause to learn her part. Mr. Symonds patronized the composer to the extent of having his music sung in his church on all high festivals, and he lent his own fine tenor voice to do it further justice—to what greater height could his ambition soar?

For the same reason, Mr. Smith was "up" in the bass. Only Joanna felt slightly embarrassed; but she coned the alto carefully, and prepared to do her best.

The hymn was "The Midnight Sunrise," and never were notes contrived that better called forth the beauty of voice and instrument. All sang admirably, but Joanna was the only one whose spirit fully harmonized with the spirit of the hymn; therefore her solo had a touching power which the others lacked—truly it was sung with heart "tenerezza,"—

Offspring of a Virgin Mother,
Lord of glory, yet our brother,
Men and angels greet each other
On thy glad nativity.

When the chorus ended, silence ensued. A few moments and Dalzell asked for the other hymn by the same author; but there was a solemnity in his voice which none had heard before.

"You had better sing the soprano this time, Kate, and I will ask Miss Hammerlye to play the accompaniment," whispered Gregory.

"No, thank you; hers is a fuller voice, and she does more justice to the music," was the reply.

Several other pieces of music followed, but none produced so strong an effect upon the listeners as "The Midnight Sunrise" had done.

"Granny, dear," said Ellie Walsingham, at breakfast, next morning, "what do you say about the Grantley concert?"

"I didn't say anything about it, love."

"Well, but what will you say? We should all like to go."

"My dear, I don't keep a carriage. If the steady folks, those, I mean, whom I know to be steady, will go, and any of you choose to walk, why I have no objection; but I can't suggest any other plan of your getting there. It is a choral concert, Mr. Elliott, but only a village affair, and you would not care to go."

"How far is it?" asked Margaret.

"Too far for you to walk," replied Granny.
"Three miles off!"

"Oh, do say you will go," pleaded Frances, throwing her arms round Joanna. "Granny will

trust us with you, for she said last night your manner was so gentle and ladylike, and you were so good, and we were to try to be like you."

Poor Joanna blushed painfully.

"I know Miss Wallstein takes long walks," said Dalzell, in a low tone.

She raised her eyes, and met those of Noel Elliott; he had heard Dalzell's remark, and not Frances's, and he thought he read the reason of the blush.

"Will you go?" she asked, thankful for the purity of purpose she read in his grave kind face.

"Gladly, if it will make you more at ease."

She thanked him with a grateful look, and promised Frances she would take charge of her. Those who were going to the concert remained in the house all day; but this was a style of thing that Kate could not stand. So she and Susan wandered by the Bath chair in which Gregory went his rounds, singing to him in the clear frosty air, or playing a merry game of repartee. The result was that both were so tired that Kate was glad to go quietly off to bed at nine o'clock,

only regretting that poor Ben must be left without any one to notice him.

"Take him with you," said Ellie; "he knows he has no friends but you. Miss Elliott is sure to stay up until they all come home, and it will be awfully lonely for you in that passage alone."

So Ben got leave to go with Kate to her room. Gregory and Susan had gone to the concert in his donkey carriage.

Mr. Symonds had surely been reckoned among the "steady ones," by Granny, for he had the power of quelling the spirits of all within a certain distance of him. Happily he did not like walking fast, so the party attached to the donkey carriage managed to keep well ahead. As for Joanna, she had a difficult part to play. Dalzell was determined to walk by her, and, unfortunately, Noel played into his hands, fancying he was thereby giving her pleasure. But she sheltered herself by keeping Frances beside her, and the party reached the village in due time. The music proved very second-rate, and Gregory insisted he should not know the things unless he were told their names

so he procured a programme, and made Hatty and Susan affix it with a pin to Mr. Symonds' coat collar, who was seated immediately before him. "It is doing the prig a kindness to turn him to profit for once, redeeming his day from its intense vapidness. And he is admirably adapted for the purpose, for having some years since swallowed the poker, he can't stoop if he wished ever so much." Some of the songs were vulgar, one in particular, the chorus of which consisted of the epigrammatic lines—

Who could resist her,
Jones's sister ?

But all served to provoke fun and merriment, and that was what most of them had gone to seek.

Joanna's motive was kindness to Frances, and Noel's kindness to Joanna, and had they not also met with a full measure of success !

As they left the village, Noel succeeded in securing Frances's hand ; and Emma Hammerlye coming up at the moment, asked, "Do let me walk by you, Mithter Elliott, I am tho frightened in the dark." He could do no less than offer his arm !

It was wonderfully dark, or seemed so, on leaving the well-lighted room, and Joanna stumbled. "Let me give you an arm, Miss Wallstein," Dalzell said; and as she hesitated, he added, "I shall feel deeply wounded if you refuse this simple civility, which any gentleman might show to a lady on a far shorter acquaintance than ours."

She dare not hesitate further, so laid her hand lightly on his arm.

"I came to the Court wholly and solely to see you, Miss Wallstein. You are my only guiding star in a dark night—a darker night than you can imagine—an Egyptian darkness that can be felt!"

"Mr. Dalzell, you deceive yourself, for I will not entertain the suspicion that you could wish deliberately to deceive another. If such darkness surrounds you, the light of no mortal friendship can dissipate it. You are seeking the living among the dead. You want God Himself."

"I want you to lead me to Him, Miss Wallstein."

"There is the point of your self-deception. In me you can only find the amusement, or I will call it by the more kindly name of interest—the interest, of an hour. You want abiding help and comfort; the need of an eternal being may be lulled by an hour's soothing, but it remains still unsatisfied."

"No; your regard, if as strong as I desire, would satisfy me."

"Indeed, you are mistaken. Many another enthusiast has tried the experiment of platonic friendship, and found in it bitter disappointment. Face your position as it stands, and look above it."

"Ah, Miss Wallstein, you are admired and beloved on every side—you do not know how lonely and bereaved my spirit is. We soldiers have no practical knowledge of a *home*—that glory and strength of our nation is denied to us!"

"It is, Mr. Dalzell. None can deny that you thereby suffer a great privation; but with patient courage and God's good blessing, that boon even may be yours in time."

“‘In time,’ ‘courage,’ ‘God’s blessing’! Miss Wallstein, your cold generalizations give more pain than all the rest I have to endure thought woman’s nature was more sympathetic. I thought you would give me hope and comfort.”

“Mr. Dalzell, I have no greater hope or comfort to give to you than that which I live myself—patience and God’s good blessing. These are my best and only possessions.”

“No, you have love!”

“Yes, thank God! Lady Mary’s and the Mr. Elliott’s.”

“And mine.”

“Thank you. And, in the same sense I believe, Mr. Elliott’s, and, above all, my friend’s, Mr. Jans’.”

“Miss Wallstein, how can you so torture me by generalizations? None love you as I do.”

“Each enthusiastic person believes his friendship the warmest under heaven,” she replied.

“I did not say *friendship*! When a man tells you he loves you, why cannot you take the word in its usual acceptance?”

“Because in this case it cannot be so. In the sense to which you allude, the word cannot be spoken except as portending one result. This, between you and me, is simply impossible. You need a fortune—your father has said it, and you have said it. I am penniless, earning my bread in a dependent situation. For this reason the word ‘love’ cannot be used between us in its common sense, so we will consider it to mean friendship.”

“We will not. As you refuse my offer, let the love perish.”

“I hardly feel you have made an offer. We have talked the matter over, and agreed that it shall not be made; so you have not the pain of feeling yourself refused.”

“Oh, that is it, is it? You think I was keeping a hole to creep out at! Understand, then, that I deliberately at this moment make you an offer of marriage.”

“And I refuse it, if you will have it so.”

“Then go and tell the whole party, and make me the laughing-stock both now and in the mess-room afterwards.”

“Mr. Dalzell, you are ungenerous to suppose me capable of such indelicate conduct. I assure you I shall not speak to a soul of the honour you have done me.”

They were entering the approach, and Frances was released by Noel as he opened the gate; she darted back, and remained behind till Joanna came up.

“Frances, where are you?” cried Noel.

“I am with Miss Wallstein,” replied Frances, from the darkness, and never was the presence of the bright girl more acceptable.

She had taken a devotion to Joanna, and persuaded her to go with her to her room, and talk to her awhile after the party had separated for the night. The gentlemen were taking wine, or spirits-and-water in the library. Dalzell looked gloomy, and poured the brandy with a freer hand than Noel liked to see, but he was not undeceived in his foregone premises, for he knew that lover’s quarrels had all kinds of strange results.

When Frances was in bed, Joanna kissed her, and felt her way along the dark passages to find

her own room; she became aware of some one approaching, but he ran up against her before perceiving her, and then said, laughing, "Are you Jones's sister?"

"No," she replied, "I am Joanna Wallstein."

"By Jove, you are!" he exclaimed, clasping her wrist, "this is luck, and there is mistletoe in this corridor, or should be, and I will claim its privileges."

"Mr. Dalzell, touch me if you dare!" was the reply, in a voice still low and musical, but expressing a displeased firmness which at once told on the weak man.

"St, st, st," said a voice within one of the adjoining rooms, and instantly a furious barking commenced, and a vehement scratching at the door, followed by the exit of Ben. Dalzell proceeded on his way, and Joanna entered by the door which the dog had forced open.

"All the men are rude this Christmas," said Kate, sitting up in bed. "Gregory spoke very rudely to me last night; that gallant officer is still ruder. Who will be rudest, I wonder? Dear

Miss Wallstein, you look sadly vexed; your room is but one door further, but Janet will be here directly, and she will go with you if you feel nervous."

"No, thank you. I have no fear now, but I was very grateful to the dog and to you."

She entered her own room, where Margaret Elliott sat reading her Bible; she looked up and remarked anxiously on Joanna's worn appearance.

"You must not take such long walks, love; they are quite too much for you."

Joanna sat down at her feet, laid her head in her lap, and burst into tears. And Margaret had her suspicions, only they were exactly the reverse of truth; for had she not done the same thing after accepting Mr. Jans?

CHAPTER XVII.

PART IN EARNEST, PART IN PLAY.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering ?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.—KEATS.

Flowers are lovely ; Love is flower-like ;
Friendship is a sheltering tree ;
O the joys that came down shower-like,
Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty.—COLERIDGE.

As the grey dawn stole over the earth on the day succeeding the village concert, it found the numerous inhabitants of Sutton Court wrapped in deep sleep. Joanna slept sweetly, her abundant tears had fully relieved her, and she felt the scene was well over. Dalzell's proposal had astonished her, for she had been fully persuaded that he had not intended to make any ; but her womanly instinct had revealed to her at the moment when he was speaking, that he was rather piqued into making a

distinct offer than really wishing to do so; and this had been so clear and full a persuasion, that she could not have been more entirely possessed by it had she overheard Dalzell's waking soliloquy,—

“A precious fool I made of myself! The girl has not a particle of sense, or she would have held me to my word; and that mass of humanity, Elliott, with his romantic platonic friendship, would have upheld her claims readily enough. Why, my virtuous dad would have hopped the twig for very despair, and I must have committed suicide before the year was out. Narrow means might have been romantic with that dainty girl for a month or two, but my life would very shortly have become intolerable; and then a pistol-shot is such a shock, drowning so cold, and hanging so awfully vulgar! Upon my word, I ought to be grateful to her, but I am not: I hate her—her calm voice, her temperate words, her commanding air. She might be grand were she a duchess, but to be enthralled by a poor dependant is an actual insult. Oh, her voice when she said, ‘Touch me, if you dare!’ Its presumptuous, yet irre-

sistible authority! I will owe her something yet; and I believe that dancing ape, Kate Dawson, heard my folly. But for that I would have transferred my allegiance to her, for she is a fascinating mortal; as it is, I shall become the knight-errant of Miss Hammerlye. The fair Joanna shall taste the pangs of jealousy, and, moreover, she shall not marry Noel Elliott!"

The party did not meet around the breakfast table until a late hour, but Dalzell had not been able to sleep for hours, and he had descended to the hall, and had wandered to the stables two hours before he could hope for his morning's meal.

"You look as if you had sat up all night, Dalzell," said Elliott. "I hope illness is not the cause of your altered appearance?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed the lieutenant. "Really I believe the excitement of last night, charming as it was, was too much for me. I have scarcely been able to sleep at all."

All expressed concern, and each interpreted his excitement according to their own taste. He was satisfied, but, on glancing around, he caught

Kate's eyes full of mischievous meaning, and he coloured deeply.

"I believe some one among us walks in their sleep," she said.

"Then it's yourself," said Gregory. "When I got home from the concert, I could not find Ben; and they said you had taken pity on his loneliness, and let him go to your room with you. Some time past midnight, when I had been sleeping the sleep of innocence for hours, I was awake by the dog scratching at my door."

"Oh, that is easily explained!" she replied, in a tone of indifference, which made Dalzell break out into a cold perspiration. "The dog awoke me up by scratching at my door, and I don't know how late that was. But what I argue from is, that I heard footsteps in the passage, and whispers too; and I feel confident there are either ghosts or somnambulists in the house."

"Oh, no," said Dalzell, with a desperate effort to turn the subject, "they are Miss Emma Hammerlye's familiar spirits. I heard some queer noises; and I believe my bedroom is near hers."

He knew the contrary of this. A lively conversation ensued, which was interrupted by the arrival of the letter-bag.

All were soon busy with their own letters, and those who had none harassed their pre-occupied neighbours by begging a share of their larger supply. Dalzell had but one, and it contained only a few lines. It was from his father.

Elliott looked up from his newspaper, and encountered his kill-joy face,—

“No bad news, I hope, Dalzell?”

“Not exactly. The governor is seedy, and fancies he has heart-complaint; indeed, the faculty assure him that such is the case. He seems to think that his life is in great danger!”

“Very anxious tidings. To be quite candid with you, Dalzell, I have great fears for Sir Ronald. This only confirms a suspicion which Jans and I formed—that some organic disease has laid hold of him. You will apply for leave, and go to him?”

“Not immediately. I will wait for the next report. I can obtain leave at any moment. I

hope the timid old baronet is alarming himself unnecessarily."

Gregory had left the room soon after the bag had been brought in; he now returned.

"Cats and dogs," he said—"for I won't insult such jolly fellows as you by calling you ladies and gentlemen—I have got some work for you. A very moderate use of your optics will show you that vapour crystals, commonly known by the vulgar name of snow-flakes, are falling, and that it is out of the question to play in the garden. Now, Solomon, or somebody else, said, that 'Idleness was the parent of many vices,' and we want none of that brood here. So, behold a task for every one, and take your choice of evils. Each one of you must either write a fairy-story twelve pages long, or a poem descriptive of the comet, introducing the battle of Alma, the song of Thekla, the character of David Elginbrod, and the glory of a peacock's tail; or, thirdly, he, she, or it may write an epigram on a disagreeable position, the railroad of life, the wars of the Roses, table-turning, or a saint praying in a wood. The best

production in each class will receive a medal. Now, my little dears, you pays your money and you takes your choice."

"You don't expect me to twist my brain into such gimcracks?" asked Noel.

"But I do, though. If not you pay a fine of five shillings. Here is paper and ink, go to work, my children, and flog your brains till tea-time. Dinner-time is already here."

It seemed a matter of course to submit to the dictation of the cripple, so all began their tasks. Penrose placed himself in a corner, with his back to the party, and, after plugging both his ears, applied himself to his composition; Joanna sat between Hatty and Frances, manufacturing a fairy story herself, and helping her neighbours; the one with a ludicrous poem, the other with an epigram on table-turning. Kate seated herself near Dalzell and Sophy Hammerlye, and then said to Janet,—

"I shall write an epigram on a disagreeable position, for I have a case in point ready."

Dalzell winced again.

As the light began to wane Ensign Penrose removed the wool from his ears, stretched himself, and exclaimed joyfully,—

“The anguish is over! my epigram is ready!” and he threw himself, apparently exhausted, on a couch.

But many of the party were occupied the whole evening with their tasks, and at ten o'clock, when Mrs. Walsingham proposed that all should retire for the night, many pleaded for another hour.

“Gregory says we are to show our work in the morning, and he has no mercy, do let us finish to-night, dear Granny. We have all been very good!” pleaded Janet.

“Good!” ejaculated Granny; “you are the noisiest, dirtiest, latest-sitting-up-at-night set that I have ever had. Look at this room, strewn from end to end with scraps of paper! I dare say your pretty evening dresses are all inked!”

Joanna heard this address—“Shall I go to bed, and by making the move, suggest the plan to such as have finished their work?” she asked.

“No, my dear, you and Kate, and Mr. Penrose,

and Mr. Symonds, can sing us those beautiful hymns to compose and soothe our minds ; the rest will work the better for the accompaniment."

Joanna and Kate prepared to do as she wished. Kind Lady Mary had sent beautiful chrysanthemums for her favourite, and she looked an impersonation of purity and truth, as she stood singing those exquisite cadences. Granny noted little how time went from the moment that the music began, and it was near midnight when she again sounded her alarm. Music, books, and writing materials were hurried away, and, in the general confusion, Frances took occasion to throw her arms round Joanna's neck somewhat roughly, exclaiming,—“Oh, you are such 'a darling, and so jolly ! Isn't she, Kate ?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Kate, merrily, “such a new friend is a thorough lamb.”

Joanna did not notice that Frances's rough affection had loosened a flower from her hair, but she missed it when she reached her room. Granny Walsingham had no flowers, so she would put hers in water for another occasion.

The morning was fine, and though the snow lay thick on the ground, yet all were eager to turn out. Little, however, could be done, except snow-balling, and a lively match took place. Gregory claimed the labour of all to make a snow-man and a snow-hut, and so the early part of the day passed pleasantly enough.

As Joanna was dressing for the evening she heard a tap at the door, and Kate entered with some branches, laden with clusters of berries as bright and abundant as those of the mountain-ash. "Let me put these in your hair and in your dress," she said.

"Thank you; they are beautiful! and it is so kind of you! But don't you want them yourself?"

"No. I have been making love to a cottager for them. She has torn a quantity of the trailing branches of the Cotoneaster off her wall; they are thick set with crimson berries, and Janet is making me a wreath of them."

"And Janet, what has she got?"

"Oh, Janet can't wear red, and she is tired of

green, so she will wear an artificial affair, ponderous, and in bad taste, like the imposing structures which the Hammerlyes load their heads with."

"Would Janet mind wearing my chrysanthemums? They are quite fresh again."

"She will be delighted with them. She is so good-natured in wanting me to have the prettiest things, that I am charmed to get something for her! There, you are finished off, and are a great success. May I give you a kiss?"

Joanna kissed the enthusiastic girl, and got all ready to assist Margaret Elliott in her toilette.

The evening was devoted to reading the compositions; each signed a cipher, keeping a duplicate of their trade-mark. It was agreed that only the successful effusions should be traced home.

Gregory read, and read well; all listening with breathless eagerness. The first epigram was in Mr. Symonds' handwriting—"A Saint praying in a Wood :"—

To fast and pray we are by nature taught,
Oh, that we could do either as we ought;
Alas, for me, my adverse fate is such,
I pray too little, and I fast too much.

“Pooh,” exclaimed the pitiless censor, “that is an old Cambridge bon-mot! I have heard my father tell it a dozen times of a fellow who got put on short commons for shirking his chapels!”

Mr. Symonds looked searchingly into each face in the company, as if bent on divining the author of the plagiarism.

Next came “The Railroad of Life,” in a disguised hand:—

On the railroad of life
There is many a break,
And likewise many a buffer;
Keep your eye on the guard,
When your ticket you take,
Lest the lines should grow harder and rougher.

Shouts of applause greeted this epigram; all expected it to be the favourite. Then “Table-Turning:”—

If you should be so bold,
The rapping trick to try,
The table would such tales unfold,
That you'd turn tail and fly.

“Pretty well, for Dalzell, under the circumstances,” was his criticism, knowing it was Hatty's

writing, and expecting something better from the lieutenant's pen. But that gentleman was conscious of having done poor justice to himself in his composition, so he shrugged his shoulders, and adopted the more creditable brochure.

Gregory next read out "A Disagreeable Position," and Dalzell trembled in his shoes, vowing vengeance on Kate, should she have gone too near to the truth :—

The tunnel was dark,
The musician was base,
The *belle* had no *mettle*,
Though brazen *his* face,
There resounds through the carriage a cannonade kiss,
Lo, the cornet's moustache on the lips of a miss !

"Humph," said Granny. "That is yours, Gregory."

"Is it the best, mother ?"

"No ; tell me if it is yours."

"Well, the question is unfair. But, out of courtesy, I will answer it. The epigram is mine."

"I thought so because it grazes the margin of propriety. Have you any others to read ?"

“ Only one, and it is also on ‘ The Railroad of Life : ’—

Life's nought but a journey
 'Tis all ups and downs,
 With green fields for smiles
 And tunnels for frowns ;
 We must put on the steam
 And work with a will,
 Since only the sleepers
 May always lie still.

“ And now for the votes ! ”

When counted up the largest numbers were in favour of the last read, “ The Railroad of Life,” and Kate received Tennyson's poems as a prize.

“ I meant it to have been a medal bearing my effigy,” said Gregory, “ but it was more convenient to give the portrait of my mind, which you will find within those boards, than one of my body.”

“ I know which portrait you mean,” she said, “ it is this—

‘ With lips depressed as he was meek,
 Himself unto himself he sold :
 Upon himself himself did feed :
 Quiet, dispassionate, and cold,
 And other than his form of creed,
 With chiselled features clear and sleek.’ ”

Kate dived under the table, for a heavy volume flew across at her head. She bobbed up to say,—

“I shall value the book for the portrait more than for anything else,” and bobbed under to avoid another missile.

The game was stopped by the entrance of a servant, with a telegraphic message to Dalzell.

He read it nervously, then said,—

“My father is dangerously ill, and summons me; I must start at once.”

It was snowing again. Granny offered to send a servant to Overstone to bring a carriage, but Elliott said, quietly,—

“If you start at once, on foot, you will catch the night-mail, but if you wait till a carriage is procured, you must inevitably miss it. I will walk with you, let us start at once.”

Dalzell was ashamed to own how hard that night march seemed to his self-indulgent nature, and he went forth thinking more of his own hardship than of his dying father.

New Year's Day came, with its stockings full of

presents, and merry games, and kindly wishes. When Joanna entered the breakfast-room Noel was there alone. He took her hand kindly, and with a cordial grasp wished her all blessings and all joy. She answered with frank confidence, feeling the truth of his nature infinitely restful to her. The year was opening peaceably to her, for the laboured heart was free at last. Dalzell had charmed her by his surface attraction at first, but she had gradually realized more and more how little of reality there was about him, and the tone he had assumed after returning from the concert, together with his indifference about his father, had fully opened her eyes. One thing she felt he had been generous in ; he had shown her every polite attention in public, though he avoided any private intercourse as carefully as she did. She little guessed that this course was adopted entirely in the hope of persuading Elliott and his aunt that she was engaged to him, nor how fully the device succeeded.

When the party dispersed, and "Granny Walsingham's Christmas" was at an end, Elliott

returned home to dwell on every look and word and act of Joanna's, to admire her more, and to love her more in his grand, self-denying, un-earthly way, but to dismiss more determinedly than ever from his mind the once-cherished hope that he might ever make her his own !

▼

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND.

Before my face as, shrinking in my lair
Like hounded hart, I felt the bristling hair
Of my stark flesh stand up, there silent past
A spirit!
Upon me craven fear and trembling came,
And my bones shook within their quaking frame;
From closing pores my sweat in frozen tears
Exuded, motionless.

Sir Ewain, by BAILLEY PORTEUS.

WHEN a week or two had passed, after the return of the various members of the Christmas gathering to their respective homes, Margaret Elliott called on Lady Mary, to prefer a request that she might take Joanna back with her to a quiet tea, after which they purposed holding a council of state upon certain weighty matters. Lady Mary, now as indulgent to her adopted sister as she was for-

merly to herself, eagerly assented, and hurried Joanna away to prepare for her excursion.

"The dear girl is greatly better for her sojourn at Sutton Court, Miss Elliott; she has been quite herself since her return."

"I felt sure it would be so," replied Margaret; "she won all hearts while there; and though I was disappointed by seeing no improvement in her spirits at first, yet as the days passed on, she became more and more light-hearted."

"Did Mr. Dalzell—Sir Henry, we must now call him!—pay her much attention?"

"He paid her marked attention. My impression was that she had engaged herself to him; but as she did not speak on the subject, I could not question her. Perhaps her only failing point is her intense reserve; but I cannot even blame that, for, with her high character, I always fancy that she has some noble motive for any course of conduct that seems strange."

"You only do her justice, dear Miss Elliott. She is a puzzle to me in this matter. I am sure she used to *like* the gay lieutenant; as to love, I

never could feel sure, for one so sensitive as Joanna would never confess love, even to herself, unless it had been distinctly asked of her. Yet it now seems to me that she has no pleasure in speaking of him. Were she engaged, she would surely feel it right to tell me?"

"Unless he had asked her to keep the matter secret. My own suspicions point to this as the reading of the riddle. Noel is of the same opinion, for when Mr. Dalzell parted from him that night at Overstone, he asked him to take especial care of Miss Wallstein while she remained at the Court."

"Well, I can scarcely rejoice. I liked the young man exceedingly at first, but the first impressions of him are the best. His face and manner promise much, but one never comes to the realization of the promise. But that sweet girl will assuredly develop all that is excellent in his character; her unselfishness and gentleness would reform any misguided mind, and it will be a splendid position for her, so we will hope the best. Perhaps she may open her heart to her old friend Mr. Jans!"

Joanna entered, equipped for her drive, and the friends started, promising that she should return at an early hour.

Jans looked the picture of happiness at that snug tea-table. His countenance had changed greatly for the better since his engagement with Margaret. Her unswerving truth and affection, her simplicity and firmness of purpose, had given anchorage both to his intellect and his heart. He ceased to carp and fret upon every disputable point; and when in discussing a vexed question, which he would treat as a matter of life and death, he encountered her smile, the point at issue at once dwindled to its intrinsic insignificance, and he rejoiced in the manifested good around him. By her side, and with his favourite Joanna near him, and his dearest male friend opposite, he felt his happiness entire.

“I say, old fellow, you should be ‘carted,’ as Syd would call it, as a vignette for a superior style of valentine. No praise of Cupid or of Hymen that I have ever read, in prose or verse, pleaded half so strongly for its blessedness as that satisfied face of yours does. You would purr if

you could ; you have the same composed, contented air that a cat wears when purring like a diminutive water-mill."

"Go thou and do likewise," replied Jans. "But," he continued, "men and brethren, we are met together on this very question. Margaret has fixed the day, and all other arrangements we are to settle in full council here assembled."

Jans had not noticed the blank expression of pain and void which passed over his friend's face when he delivered his injunction ; but Joanna did see it, and wondered at its meaning, on that and many a succeeding day.

It was agreed that the wedding should be very quiet—Jans shrank from a show, and Margaret disliked the idea equally. He began to inveigh against all gay weddings.

"We will let other people take their way in peace," said Margaret, gently. "To a young girl, the pomp and glare of a public wedding seems the great romance of life. She sees all through a rosy medium, she worships and seeks worship, not only from her chosen lover, but from all her circle of

friends, from all the congregation, from all the beggars at the gate even, to whom she shows a glimpse of her lace and orange-flowers as the bridegroom tosses forth his handful of halfpence. We older people, who have advanced into the full stream of life, and know its solemn realities, are too much awed by God's great gift to us, and our own weighty responsibilities depending therefrom, to have a thought of our own glory. We want those we love to be present, for love is now revealed to us in greater fulness than before, and we see it to be the true cement of every kind of union. We want only the presence of God and our loved ones."

"I daresay you are right, Margaret, but I can't help shrinking from the gay brides who seek display at such a season."

He would have pursued the subject, and brought his keen wit and sarcasm to chastise the frivolities he disliked; but Margaret's gentle smile said so plainly, "Condemn not, judge not," that he let the subject drop.

Joanna and Ellie Walsingham were to be the

only bridesmaids; Noel and Syd would attend in quality of father and best-man. But who should perform the ceremony?

"Oh, not Dr. Vansettle!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Not Father John!" added Jans, with decision.

"Would not the rector allow your friend Mr. Marriott to officiate, Mr. Jans?" asked Joanna.

"An excellent thought! It would make him less jealous than bringing Quiller or his curate over. I'll try that on."

Jans accompanied Joanna home.

"My dear," he said, "I am delighted to see you looking so well and bright. I wish you could tell me that you are going to take the same step that I am; it would be such a comfort to see you settled!"

"I am settled, Mr. Jans. Lady Mary's home is perfectly restful to me. I am happier than I ever expected to be."

"Poor Noel will be very lonely when I have left him. I tell him he ought to marry."

"I daresay he will take your advice into consideration. Like Chaucer's 'Markis,' he will do so for the sake of the tenantry. Who knows but that he has his eye on some 'patient Griselda' now, and is getting her trousseau made in the true Chaucerian fashion!"

"I wish you could be his Griselda, Joanna."

"Thank you," she said, and laughed merrily. "I had better be getting up my part; it would need some practice to enable me to receive an offer kneeling, and to reply,—

'But as ye wil yourself right, so wol I;'

but I know that there are no such things as impossibilities. Come to me when you can spare an hour from Miss Elliott; you shall take the part of father and 'Markis' alternately, and I will try and get *au fait* at my lesson. Lady Mary will be prompter!"

Jans left her utterly perplexed. Her raillery might have a meaning, or it might be an accidental outbreak of mere mirthfulness! Certainly, Noel could never have wounded her by assuming any tone of patronage; such a tone was contrary

to his nature, and his reverence for true womanhood was so deep and pure !

When he called upon the rector, he found him suave and obliging in the extreme. He would gladly lend the church to any friend of Mr. Jans at such a season ; when “ the most tender feelings of nature were thrown into most luxuriant play, it was natural in the extreme that the friend of a man’s bosom should tie the interesting knot.” He congratulated him warmly, holding him fast with his flabby hands, and becoming quite tearful over the blessings that he heaped on him ; and he asked if all the preparations for the feast were perfected.

Jans replied that all was in due course of preparation, and that he was going to drive Miss Margaret Elliott to Overstone that afternoon to complete her purchases. At last the rector allowed him to depart.

When Jans and Margaret had driven off to Overstone, a visitor was announced, and Bertha rose to greet Dr. Vansettle. He drew his chair near to her—too near to please her taste, but she

would not wound his feelings by pushing her own further back.

“Miss Elliott, I have never fully congratulated you upon your sister’s marriage,” he said. “Some people are able to gauge the value of a blessing by having tasted its sweetness, others by having hungered in vain for it. The latter is our case, Miss Bertha, with reference to this tender and gracious matter.”

Bertha could scarcely repress a smile—she did not feel it worth while to repel his assertion that she had “hungered in vain” for marriage, so she only replied to his congratulation,—

“It is a great happiness to me, both for my sister’s sake, and my own; I feel sure Mr. Jans will be a true brother to me!”

“Brother!” exclaimed the rector, laying his hand upon his heart, and turning up the whites of his eyes; “what can an adopted brother do to satisfy the yearning of a craving heart? We want to be loved and to love for ourselves, Miss Bertha, to have one all our own, our lawful wedded spouse. Listen to me,” he continued,

“fair angel of goodness, it’s never too late to mend: let you and me find a refuge from all life’s sorrows in each other’s arms; come and grace my home, and let the happy day that celebrates the union of your sister with her beloved, witness also the solemn joining of our hands and hearts.”

For a moment she was too much surprised to reply, so he added,—

“I have a good income, seven hundred a year, and what you have will descend to our children.”

She started at these words, as if she had received an electric shock. He was gazing into her face, having drawn so near her that his short, hot breath fanned her cheek. She pushed her chair far back now, and said,—

“I am obliged by the honour you would do me, Dr. Vansettle; but I am resolved never to marry.”

“You are not too old yet!” he exclaimed, pulling his chair towards her. “I have looked in the register, and you are only in your forty-sixth year. You know George the Fourth thought forty the most perfect age for a woman.”

"I do not mean to marry, sir."

"Then don't go marrying somebody else, or it will be the worse for you. You see Miss Wallstein does not get a husband. She'd better have had me, for no good comes by crossing me." He said this in a whining tone, half crying at the time.

"Have you proposed to her?"

"Well, if I did, that need not set you against me. I thought it was a very good chance for her, she penniless, and me with seven hundred a year. But perhaps she has repented of her folly! Perhaps she has asked you to tell me so? I could forgive her, for I am old and lonely, and I want a wife."

"I believe you, sir," replied Bertha, with an air of severity she had never before been seen to wear. "You are old, and your nerves are shaken by the life you lead. I don't doubt you want a fresh life, and a stronger nerve beside you. Joanna has felt your proposal too great an insult to speak of, and if you offered to her ten times she would refuse you with ever-increasing repugnance. I desire to be alone."

"I'll go, then; but you need not be so hard upon me. It never was reckoned a sin for a man to want to marry! I think you've treated me very ill, very ill," and he shuffled out of the room, whimpering dolefully.

It was a dull, dark day, and, as the twilight drew on, he sat by the fire, one candle only burning on his table. A bottle of spirit was by his side, and he sipped from a glass from time to time. But ever and anon he cast his eyes at the dark corners of the room, and started at every sound. At last, he took the bottle under his arm, and, carrying the candle in his shaking hand, shuffled away into the kitchen.

"What do you want?" asked a large, red-faced woman, while she seized a bottle off her tea-table, and hid it in the cupboard."

"I'll sit by you, Martha. It's so lonely in the parlour."

"No, now, you won't, master. It'll hurt my good name. If t'clerk comes in and finds you here, he'll say we're kinder than we should be!"

"I want a wife, Martha—somebody to be by me always."

"Then get a wife!" roared Martha, "and I'll leave you that minute, and see what becomes of the jams and the pickles, and the bacon, and the wines and spirits! Get a wife, and get out of my kitchen!"

"But, Martha, if you would be kind to me, and not frighten me so, I wouldn't mind marrying you."

"None of your hanky-panky tricks. You don't mean a real, fast, church marriage."

"I do, I do—by heaven, I do!"

"What, such as'll give me a right to my thirds as your widow?"

"Yes, Martha, a true marriage, till death us do part."

"That won't be long to wait," soliloquized Martha and then she added, graciously, "In that case you can stop here."

"I'd like the wedding to be as soon as possible," said the doctor, as she spread a carpet, and fetched an easy chair for him, and lit his pipe, and strengthened his grog; "only it would be better we should be married in another parish. Couldn't

you go to your sister at Sutton for three weeks, and then I can come and marry you there."

Martha approved this plan, as it would give her time to get her things ready, and it was fixed that she should go on the morrow.

"We can get Betty Green to do for you while I'm away, but I won't have you sitting in the kitchen with her." She gave him a menacing look as she said this, which did not promise great docility for the future.

"No, no, Martha, I'll promise that," he replied, eagerly.

And he kept his word.

Irskill boasted one public-house, kept by a man, the only good of whose character consisted in saving his own money. He was only drunken when he could be so at the expense of another. During Martha's absence, this man was the rector's constant guest. The two friends played cards till midnight on the Saturday, while Betty scrubbed and cleaned, and got the house into order for the new mistress. She had the satisfaction of finishing off the chambers during that first week, and

on Monday she proposed to begin the parlour, and gave orders to the sweep to be there by daybreak to sweep that especial chimney. Being an advocate for absolute faith in the honesty of her class, especially when only the goods of another were imperilled, she agreed to leave the house-door on the latch, and a dust-sheet or two laid in the kitchen, and she made the sweep's boy promise to cover everything up, and do all very quietly, so as not to disturb her, for she was not a believer in the advantages of early rising.

After church on the Sunday night, the rector brought King the publican home with him, and got out spirit for his delectation. Betty looked cross, for she did not want to have to sit up; and Vansettle, divining the cause of her sulkiness, told her to go to bed, as he should have no further need of her services.

"Couldn't we have t' cards out?" asked King, with a sly air.

"Not yet, not yet," replied the parson. "All must be done decently and in order, and the Sabbath hours must not be profaned."

"That's a new tune for you, doctor!"

"No, but it isn't. The Sabbath hours *are* sacred, King. I dare not play cards till twelve has struck; I should be sure to lose!"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" rejoined his friend, with a sneer, and, rising, he put the clock forward twenty minutes.

At last the hour struck. The doctor grinned, and got out the cards; the candle burnt with a long wick, and they were generally too much engrossed with their game to pause to snuff it. Again and again they applied to the spirit bottle, and the doctor's hand became more and more tremulous. The game was pretty equal, and the eagerness of both increased as it progressed. They did not notice how time was passing, nor how the candle guttered and wasted, until it began to flicker, and as the parson looked round in the uncertain light, a dark figure glided into the room, and stood grinning awfully before him. The old man's spirit quailed: it was certainly the devil come to fetch him for beginning to play twenty minutes before the Sabbath was over. A

great horror possessed him; he broke out into a cold perspiration, and, falling heavily on his knees before the apparition, he cried, in tremulous accents, his teeth chattering the while,—

“ Oh, terrible spirit, spare me this once; grant me a little longer time, and I will do all you please.”

A burst of rude merriment followed this address, but the old man knew it not. He had become insensible from a kind of paralysis, and his half-drunken companion, assisted by the sweeps, carried him to bed, and summoned the doctor. The seizure was not a severe one, and he recovered gradually, whilst the story of his panic spread like wildfire in the parish, making him the laughing-stock of rich and poor !

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